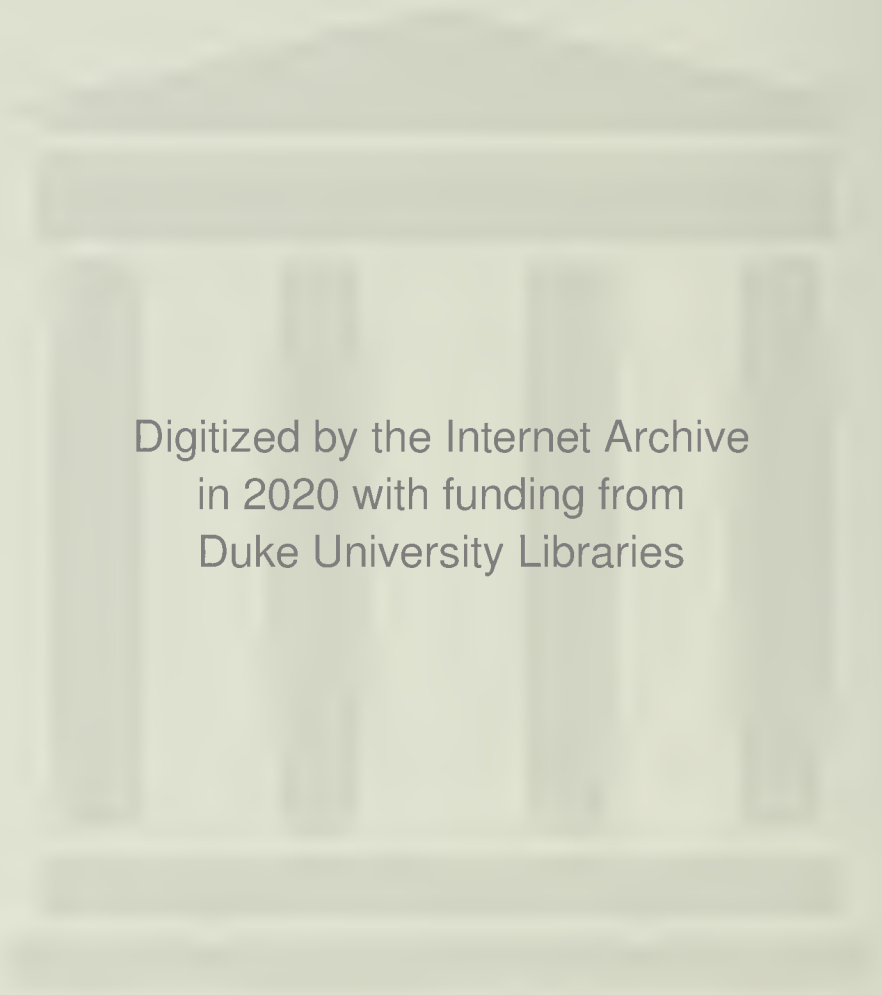
MEDIA, EROTICS, AND TRANSNATIONAL ASIA

Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein, Editors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PURNIMA MANKEKAR AND
LOUISA SCHEIN, EDS.

Duke University Press
Durham and London 2012

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ♾

Typeset in Warnock Pro by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data appear on the last printed page of this book.

Chapter 3 originally appeared as "Zines and Zones of Desire: Mass-Mediated Love, National Romance, and Sexual Citizenship in *Gay* Indonesia," by Tom Boellstorff, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 63, Issue 2 (May 2004), 367–402. Copyright © 2004 Association for Asian Studies. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

Chapter 6 originally appeared as "Dangerous Desires: Television and Erotics in Late Twentieth-Century India," by Purnima Mankekar, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 63, Issue 2 (May 2004), 403–31. Copyright © 2004 Association for Asian Studies. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

Chapter 7 originally appeared as "Homeland Beauty: Transnational Longing and Hmong American Video," by Louisa Schein, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 63, Issue 2 (May 2004), 433–63. Copyright © 2004 Association for Asian Studies. Reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

PURNIMA MANKEKAR dedicates this book to her brother Ajit Mankekar (1955–2003) for raging against the dying of the light.

LOUISA SCHEIN remembers with this book her grad school theory brother, Mark Saroyan (1960–1994): Your brilliance and your early loss to AIDS pushed me to go deep into sexuality studies.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As academic projects transform into collective endeavors, they become truly pleasurable and rewarding. Over the years that it has taken to bring this project to fruition, many colleagues, friends, and family members have generously contributed guidance, provocations, and support. Our earliest musings on erotics, media, and Asia emerged from numerous meals at conferences from which developed a close friendship coupled with intensely generative intellectual synergy that gave rise to this work. At the same time, our commitments emerged from the urgency of the AIDS crisis, which has called so many of us to take action around the complex, uneven interplay of meanings and practices inherent in sexualities and erotics.

We first began presenting pieces of the collection at the Association for Asian Studies annual meetings in 2000, where we benefited from astute comments from Paroma Roy and several members of the audience. Celine Parreñas Shimizu and Ralph Litzinger enriched our thinking by contributing their own work on erotics and media at that venue. Louisa Schein and Purnima Mankekar presented essays at the Crossroads in Cultural Studies conference in Birmingham, U.K., in 2000. We are grateful to members of that audience for their questions and feedback. Anne Allison and Lawrence Cohen provided stimulating critique at a panel we organized at the American Anthropological Association meetings in 2000. Earlier versions of the chapters by Boellstorff, Mankekar, and Schein were published in the *Journal of Asian Studies* (2004, volume 6, number 3), where we benefited from suggestions from editor Ann Waltner and the anonymous peer reviewers for the journal. Our editor at Duke University Press, Ken Wissoker, has epitomized

patience, enthusiasm, and good humor throughout the process of preparing the manuscript for publication. We cannot thank him enough for his support and guidance. Several anonymous reviewers worked hard on the integrity of the volume, sometimes even reviewing more than once. At Duke University Press, the manuscript was shepherded through the production process by Anitra Grisales, Courtney Berger, Mandy Earley, Jade Brooks, and Liz Smith. We are grateful to them for their assistance and diligence. Finally, we thank Scott Smiley for accommodating our schedule to do the index for this book.

Purnima Mankekar would like to acknowledge the hard work of Rozita Dimova (Stanford University) and Preeti Sharma (UCLA). Their close readings, bibliographic help, and assistance with literature reviews have been indispensable. Louisa Schein thanks Shin Lee, Ying-Chao Kao, and Shanthi Shanduga for their assistance with research and bibliographic editing. Dillon Mahoney provided invaluable bibliographic and technical input in the final stages. Several of our students have provided astute commentary, generous critique, and warm intellectual camaraderie over the years. Purnima Mankekar wishes to thank students in her Anthropological Approaches to Sexuality graduate seminar (co-taught with Barbara Voss) at Stanford University for their comments and close readings of the introduction and her essay. Louisa Schein is much indebted to the wide-ranging provocation of dozens of undergraduates in her Critical Sexualities classes over the years. Colleagues at Rutgers and Stanford as well as several of our contributors offered rigorous readings and critique of the introduction. Louisa Schein thanks Carlos Decena and Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, and Purnima Mankekar is grateful to Barb Voss, Sylvia Yanagisako, and Akhil Gupta. Outside Stanford, Anjali Arondekar has been a wonderful interlocutor and provided invaluable suggestions as we revised our introduction. Purnima Mankekar would also like to express her appreciation of the wonderful intellectual and political community provided by the South Asia Reading Group in the San Francisco Bay Area, which, over the years, consisted of Anjali Arondekar, Paola Bacchetta, Aditya Behl, Lawrence Cohn, Vasudha Dalmia, Inderpal Grewal, Akhil Gupta, Saba Mahmood, Raka Ray, and Parama Roy.

Purnima Mankekar is particularly grateful to friends and colleagues who have made her transition from Stanford University to UCLA so seamless and pleasurable, especially Anurima Banerji, Ali Behdad, Lucy Burns, Grace Hong, Keith Camacho, Beth Marchant, Saloni Mathur, Kathleen McHugh, Aamir Mufti, Dan Neuman, Arundhati Neuman, Chon Noriega, Sherry Ortner, Aparna Sharma, Monica Smith, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Tim Taylor,

and Juliet Williams. She wishes to thank the chairs of her two departments, Chris Littleton, Cindy Fan, Lane Hirabayashi, Beth Marchant, Jinqi Ling, and Jenny Sharpe, for their unwavering support. Students at UCLA, chiefly, Amanda Apgar, Chloe Coventry, Devaka Gunawardena, Veena Hampapur, Brian Hu, Naveen Minai, Stephanie Santos, Preeti Sharma, and Mihiri Tillakaratne, have all been a pleasure to work with and have pushed her to clarify her intellectual arguments in productive ways. She acknowledges with gratitude and affection the ever-wonderful South Asian/American Studies Reading Group consisting of some of the students mentioned above as well as Diya Bose, Camille Frazier, and Gina Singh for being her reading companions. And she can never thank enough her writing companions, Jessica Cattelino, Lieba Faier, Hannah Landecker, Abigail Saguy, and Juliet Williams for their warm support and rigorous feedback through all her writing endeavors. Last but not least, the staff in her two departments, Stacey Hirose, Samantha Hogan, Richard Medrano, Jenna Miller Von-Ah, and Jessie Singh, have always been incredibly supportive and have helped her life at UCLA run smoothly.

We are deeply grateful to our authors for their incredible endurance, positive energy, hard work, and intellectual generosity, and would like to note, with particular appreciation, the close readings and feedback provided by Anne Allison, Tom Boellstorff, and Martin Manalansan on the introduction. We would also like to thank Celine Parreñas Shimizu for her intellectual inputs and contagious enthusiasm in the early stages of the preparation of this volume, and express regret that her chapter could not be included in the final manuscript. Mark Liechty and Ralph Litzinger were fellow travelers at the initial stages in the project. Our volume is poorer for our inability to include their contributions.

Our families have provided invaluable support. Purnima Mankekar wishes to express her appreciation to Akhil Gupta and Kamla Mankekar for their loving support; while Deeya Shivani's presence has slowed down her academic production, she has also brought immeasurable joy, laughter, and much-needed balance into her life. Louisa Schein is forever indebted to Ernie Renda for his endurance and inimitable good humor, and to Sophia Renda and Ernesto Renda, who, alongside this book, have grown up and matured in their politics in so many ways.

MEDIATIONS AND TRANSMEDIATIONS

Erotics, Sociality, and "Asia"

On January 18, 2007, the Indian government banned the satellite television channel AXN, a unit of the Sony Entertainment Network, claiming that its telecast of the program *World's Sexiest Advertisements* was "likely to adversely affect public morality."[1] Although the ban was lifted on March 1, it was only one of a series of protests launched by the state, political parties, and civic groups anxious about how transnational public culture was allegedly contaminating Indian culture. For instance, in April 2007, when the Hollywood star Richard Gere kissed the Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty at an AIDS awareness event in Delhi, angry mobs responded by burning effigies of Gere and Shetty for "spreading obscenity."[2] Meanwhile, in China, Beijing law enforcement officials had to drop charges in a three-year case against a woman who had initiated nude Internet chats using her webcam on the grounds that nude chat rooms were "not defined" in China's pornography laws. But in the same month, the Ministry of Public Security launched a major six-month campaign to purge pornography from the Chinese Internet, the vice minister of public security alleging that "the inflow of pornographic materials from abroad and lax domestic controls [were] to blame for the existing problems in China's cyberspace."[3]

These bursts of outrage and efforts at regulation do more than signal how imputed eroticisms can become lightning rods for battles over cultural authenticity. Going beyond journalistic clichés that fetishize the purported incitements and repressions of the exotic East ("What became of the land of the Kama Sutra?" screamed the headline of a *First Post* article about the Indian government's ban on AXN), these instantiations of moral panic high-

light the entwining of the pleasures and anxieties surrounding erotics, sociality, and transnational media.

In this volume we engage the intersections of transnational media, erotics, and identity within Asia and across Asian diasporas. The global traffic in images and texts across Asia and its diasporas is hardly a new phenomenon, and it is not our intent to exceptionalize the present historical moment. Yet it would be a mistake to underestimate the monumental changes in the scale and reach of transnational media over the course of the past three decades. The media texts we cover in this volume range from highly amateur and grassroots forms to professional and globally dominant forms. They include media such as cinema, radio, satellite television, popular novels, and "self health" literature, as well as media that do not necessarily circulate on a mass scale, such as video, the Internet, and zines. Our methods are similarly multifarious, comprising studies of production as well as audience reception, attending both to modalities of media use and to the more ineffable process of meaning-making.

We do not ascribe singular or totalizing power to transnational media in the construction or reshaping of erotics. Nor do we claim that mediated erotics supplant or replace "prior" forms. Instead, we are concerned with how mediated erotics are both embedded within and constitute sociality at the present historical moment; thus, for instance, mediated erotics refract formations of race, class, and caste so as to redraw axes of social inequality. Going beyond approaches to media that are reflectionist ("media reflect what is going on in society and culture") or behaviorist ("media affect behavior in such-and-such a manner"), we explore the myriad ways media implicate cognition, affect, and the body so as to problematize the boundaries between the psychic and the corporeal. Indeed, mediated erotics recast—as well as trouble—normative constructions of the body and of corporeality: pulsating out of iPods, flickering across television screens and computer monitors, casting flirtatious glances at us from billboards, mediated erotics create sensoria and generate patterns of intimacy that confound assumptions about propinquity and distance, physicality and virtuality. Through their (often discontinuous) itineraries across region and nation, mediated erotics enable forms of affect and reimagined sodalities that variously transgress and reinscribe dominant notions of community and identity. In a plurality of sites, mediated erotics participate in renewed forms of place-making through boundary-crossing and the reification of cultural difference; the desires spawned by media erotics enable new modes of physical and imaginative travel for migrants and for consumers of globalized popular culture.

Prevailing conceptions of Asia conjure an eroticized space formed through desires and anxieties embedded in "the Western gaze." Conventions of eroticizing Asia hark back to the discourses chronicled in Saidian Orientalism (1980) and persist into the current era, in which Asian bodies come in for disproportionate porn representation online, pulling in a staggering 25 to 30 percent of revenues in a multibillion-dollar industry (Tu 2003, 267). We draw attention to how Asia and Asian diasporas have become sites for the production of a multiplicity of media texts that circulate on a transnational scale, such as sexually explicit Japanese manga, pornography, video, Bollywood cinema, a booming print industry of zines, documentary and travel video, magazines, novels, and satellite television. As these mediated texts travel across different "cultural contexts" they participate, organically and foundationally, in the construction of particular kinds of spaces and temporalities. How then do contemporary assemblages of media and erotics enable the reconfiguration of "Asia" itself?

Our book resonates with the continuing importance—perhaps the resurgence—of Asia on many discursive and political registers. There is little doubt that much of the discourse on "rising" or "emerging" Asia is mediated by the interests of globalized capital (as in the excitement surrounding emerging markets) and the imperatives and anxieties of U.S. and European imperial interests. (Asia, after all, is a site where the war on terror has been waged.) Our objective is to foreground the contemporary reconfiguration of Asia through its intensifying centrality to circuits of transnational cultural traffic. In our conception, Asia emerges as an unstable signifier as well as a palimpsest of discrepant genealogies, temporalities, and histories.

Our analyses reflect the spatial reconfigurations produced by migration, the peregrinations of transnational media, and the global traffic in capital and commodities. These analyses include studies of zines among dispersed *gay* and *lesbi* communities across Indonesia, traveling tales of erotic liaisons between Western men and Japanese women and men, the forging of virtual communities of intimacy and longing between European or American men and Filipina and Chinese women, an internationally celebrated documentary that circulates the story of Indian children photographing their lives, and video evocations of the nostalgic fantasies of Hmong American men about "homeland" women. Our approach is not to compile "case studies" of different instantiations of erotics in distinct field sites. Instead, while scrupulously preserving the cultural, political, and historical specificities of each of these conjunctures, these chapters, taken as a whole, construct a "transnational analytics" (Grewal, Gupta, and Ong 1999) by representing the

discontinuous, nonteleological, yet unmistakable, changes occurring across diverse media-saturated cultural landscapes throughout Asia and its diasporas.

Transnational media constitute complex relationships between erotic yearning and other desires and fantasies. Our focus is on a crucial dimension of what has been called the social practice (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002) of transnational media: its constitutive role in the realm of erotics. The social locations of producers and consumers, the politics of enunciation refracting the diverse modes of address deployed by specific genres of media, the narrative repertoires on which media texts draw, and the semiotic skills of audiences and consumers crucially inflect mediated erotics. At the same time, however, sharp discontinuities might exist between authorial intentions and the interpretive negotiations of audiences, readers, and consumers. We explore the intertextualities that refract the myriad meanings that media texts acquire as they become sites of "intimate habitation" for subjects living in specific historical and cultural milieus (Mankekar 2005).

We locate erotics in terms of its imbrication with other desires and processes of subject formation. Erotic desire—or, for that matter, erotic revulsion—undoubtedly shapes behavior and social practices, even in those instances where it is not overtly manifest. As Anne Allison points out, "Desire is both of and beyond the everyday . . . desire is something that segues both into and out of the realities of everyday life" (1996, xiii). If, as in theoretical frameworks influenced by Freud and Lacan, desire is by definition unsatiable (on the impossibility of satisfying desire, see Freud 1961 and Lacan 1977; see also Žižek 1989), then to what end is desire actively incited and sustained by media in conjunction with other social institutions such as the state, structures of family and kinship, and the demands of labor and capital (Foucault 1985; Stoler 1995; see also Allison 1996, xv)? How, for example, are erotic desires produced by media articulated with the desire for commodities (Haug 1986; see also Curtis 2004, and Mankekar, this volume), fused with nostalgia for the homeland, or inseparable from longings for modernity?

Media at a Transnational Scale

Scholars have long pointed to how the expansion of transnational media has resulted in the creation of a "new communications geography" (Morley and Robins 1995, 1) and in realignments of local/global relations (Ang 1996; Appadurai 1996; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a; Hannerz 1996; Mankekar 2005; Morley 1992). As David Morley and Kevin Robins point out, "At the heart

of these historical developments is a process of spatial restructuring and reconfiguration. . . . It involves at once a transformation of the spatial matrix of society and of the subjective experience of, and orientation to, space and spatiality" (1995, 26). Not surprisingly, scholarly and popular discourses on transnational media are replete with tropes of spatiality: consider, for instance, the ubiquity of terms like circuits, flows, movements, trajectories, transmission, channels, local/global, translocal, regional, transnational, transborder, borders, boundaries, mobility, and fixity (see also Mankekar 2008). Theorizing the work of transnational media, then, requires a conceptual framework informed by a "geographic imagination" (Morley and Robins 1995, 26).

James Clifford's (1997) central metaphor of "routes" is useful here for charting the particularities of media mobilities. Yet the emphasis on following routes should not be permitted to elide the functioning of places—cities, regions, homelands, and so forth—as dynamic processes, as congeries of social relations (Massey 1993, 66–67) that are at once constituted and transected by media. As Tom Boellstorff insightfully points out in his analysis of transnational media in Indonesia, "A set of fragmented cultural elements from mass media is transformed in unexpected ways in the Indonesian context, transforming that 'context' itself in the process" (2003b, 41).[4] Similarly, it is impossible to conceive of the mediascapes created by technologies like the Internet as separate from the virtual communities they engender (see Constable, this volume).

Transnational media refashion cartographies of desire keyed to geographical and virtual places. For instance, media productions of "the West" as a place of sexual freedom powerfully shape the construction of sexual normativities in many parts of the "non-Western" world (in this volume, Boellstorff, Mankekar, and Everett Yuehong Zhang offer analyses of these processes in Indonesia, India, and China, respectively). In such instances, rather than "homogenizing" cultural difference, media may accentuate and, on occasion, re-create cultural difference through the consolidation of boundaries between "the West" and "the non-West." The role of the consumption of Western pornography in redrawing South Asian parameters of normative sex, as documented by Heather Dell (2005) and Mark Liechty (2001), is a particularly apt case in point.

When people move, other sensibilities may come into play. Erotics may be conjured not only by the boundary-marking sketched above, but also by the crossing of boundaries. One example is media-saturated nostalgia touring among members of diasporic communities, inspired by imaginaries of

homelands generated out of the interplay of media and memory (Marks 2000; Naficy 1993; Schein 2002). In the case of the Hmong diaspora, where homeland place-making is entangled with the production of mediated sexualities, "transnational erotics remix sex and space, refashioning the most intimate of interiorities. Physical distance and proximity come to be complexly articulated in the contours of homeland desire" (Schein, this volume). The erotic is produced at the fecund site of border crossings—these become spaces of both incitement and subjectification.

While attending to such spatial promiscuities, the study of transnational media likewise articulates with more structured models of global space and media power. Landmark studies have documented such structures, including Raymond Williams's (1974, 29–36) classic study of television, which detailed the penetration of U.S. broadcasting interest into non-Western countries and its foundational role in the promotion of market capitalism; Herbert Schiller's (1989) and Ben Bagdikian's (2004) trenchant critiques of the monopolization of media ownership; and Toby Miller's (1998) concept of the "new international division of cultural labor" in which U.S. media corporations outsource production to more inexpensive sites. There are myriad instances in which the powered structure of transnational media has resulted in the "import" not just of texts and commodities but of potent and hegemonic representations of modernity, progress, the market, pleasure, the self, and intimacy.

Transnational media, however, do not float over regions of the world to land like alien spaceships in "a culture." They confound models of cultural or media imperialism (see Boyd-Barrett 1977; Mattelart 1979; Tomlinson 1991) that reproduce assumptions of the spatial and temporal distinctness, even purity, of local cultures—seen as static and atemporal—versus media, which are seen as mobile and colonizing. As several scholars have affirmed, the expansion of transnational media cannot be conceptualized in terms of teleological unilinearity (Ang 1996; Appadurai 1996; Mankekar 1999; Morley 1992; Morley and Robins 1995). Take, for instance, the resounding success of STAR TV in catering to regional markets across South Asia and East Asia; the increasing appeal of Bollywood cinema among audiences in sites as disparate as Nigeria, Israel, Great Britain, the former Soviet Union, and China; the emergence of "regional" media that circulate both transregionally and transnationally; and the ever-growing significance and influence of media forms such as zines and video, which crisscross geographically dispersed communities instead of being produced and circulated on a mass scale.[5] These changes have been far from uniform across Asia (or the rest of the

world), affirming Inderpal Grewal, Akhil Gupta, and Aihwa Ong's argument that "what counts as transnational appears very different in distinct geographical and spatial settings" (1999, 653).[6]

The dramatic expansion in the reach and scale of transnational media over the past several decades has been enabled by specific developments in technology, such as the spread of satellite technologies and the Internet; economic shifts in the organization of global capital that in turn have led to the reorganization of media industries throughout the world; political and legal changes resulting in the regulation and deregulation of media industries; and tensions between the respective agendas of multinational capital and specific nation-states. Attempts to characterize these shifts run into apparent contradictions. Without doubt, the neoliberal era has seen a dramatic consolidation and privatization of media ownership. As Robert McChesney argues, what is most pronounced is the intensification of corporate influence in media policymaking, specifically the ceding of the regulation of media to the market (2004, 48–56). Equally important, and perhaps more fundamental to our conception of mediated erotics, media industries serve the market by promoting the ideological construct of "freedom" (Harvey 2005) and of the individuated—almost asocial—consumer, intoxicated by choice and enamored of ever-newer commodities. And as Schein (2008) has argued for Hmong Americans, for instance, the pursuit of media entrepreneurship is entirely consonant with the retrenchment of social welfare indexical of neoliberal shifts in both the U.S. and Chinese economies.

The model of consolidation—in terms of media ownership, influence, and ideological content—is countered, to a certain extent, by other processes. Witness, for instance, a thickening of media traffic between sites of production within Asia, exemplified by the popularity of Korean soap operas in China and Japan.[7] Moreover, as Annabelle Sreberny (2006) points out, non-Euroamerican national media industries have gained strength in recent decades, with Bollywood as the most striking example. Any analysis of these developments must also take account of the rise in diverse "new media" technologies, some of which might be more accessible across class and spatial divides, and which cannot but facilitate a proliferation of forms of production and consumption. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin have argued that "decentralized 'small media' suggests the emergence of a 'new media era' that is more fragmented and diverse in its economic and social organization . . . , more characteristic of the expansion of informal markets under neoliberalism and the fluidity of late capitalism than the older forms of mass media" (2002, 3).

One of the commonly attributed features of new media is their potential to create or enable new forms of subjectification as well as linkages and communities across great distances. For instance, in their collection on queer media in Asia, Chris Berry, Fran Martin, and Audrey Yue regard interactive media such as Internet bulletin boards, listservs, and chat rooms as having "sparked a Revolution, transforming lives and lifestyles," and as "the conditions for the emergence of new kinds of connectivity and communities" (2003a, 1–2). As we argue later in this introduction, we build on and depart from this approach by focusing on newer as well as "older" forms of media (including print, television, film, and video) that intensify forms of connectivity that have long been burgeoning within and beyond Asia. We thereby resist the implication that recent communicative forms represent an abrupt watershed of sexual expression.

We aim, then, to push beyond the binarism succinctly summarized by John Sinclair and Stuart Cunningham as follows: "Whereas flows of people often have tended to be from what the world-systems theorists call the 'periphery,' or developing world, and towards the 'centre,' or metropolitan nations (e.g. Wallerstein, 1991) media flows historically have traveled in the other direction" (2000, 2). Two forms of erasure are risked in this type of formulation. First, emphasis on the transnational mobility of persons can obscure the practices of consumption and imagining undertaken by those who never move. As Wanning Sun puts it, "Transnational imagination develops not only within those who are mobile, flexible and deterritorialized but, perhaps more poignantly, within those who cannot, will not, and have not traveled" (2006, 20). Second, and related, an emphasis on hegemonic media flows imputes cultural stasis to receiving media populations portrayed as waiting impotently to be culturally colonized. Even in instances when media texts are produced in the West they are adapted, appropriated, reconfigured, and indeed rejected as they circulate to other parts of the world.

What we underscore, however, is the critical significance of Asia to transnational traffic in media by positioning it not merely as a site of the reception of Western media but as another set of nodes for production and circulation. Mankekar shows, for instance, that television programs produced in India, ostensibly aimed at "Indian" audiences, travel via satellite to different parts of the world. Dell explores an instance in which an American-made documentary becomes the vehicle by which Indian-made photographs circulate in such locales as New York City. Analyzing the genre of documentary and the polyphony of responses (including her own), she inflects the reception

of the film with contexts ranging from the historical (for instance, colonial and neoimperial narratives of rescue) to the discursive (such as moral panics both within and outside India).

Finally, to employ the language of scale, it is important to highlight that many of the media examined in this volume are sited at *both* the transnational and the subnational scales, with the nation sometimes becoming a relatively weaker frame for production and reception (see also Appadurai 1996 and Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). The transmissive promiscuity of media has allowed such "scale jumping" (Smith 1992) to become a commonplace, such that subgroups, minoritized groups, and diasporic groups within nation-spaces might bypass the national scale to participate in transnational media circuits, and sometimes, as Schein has suggested, deploying media texts to imagine cosmopolitanism against the grain of national exclusions (Schein 1999a; see also Sun 2006 and M. M. Yang 1997).

The question of circumventing the nation provokes related debates around the so-called "public sphere" (Habermas 1979). The advent of transnational media in postsocialist states, for instance, is often lauded as a benchmark of "freedom" from state control. This raises questions of whether it is appropriate to conceptualize media as a vehicle for communications autonomous from the state, or whether increasing media conglomeration merely creates a new form of control over the unfettered speech of "the public." Without attempting to adjudicate definitively between these two positions, we note a multiplicity of debates, stressing that the binaristic notion of an oppositional public always already scripts control—whether state or corporate—as an inexorable context of mediated speech. We want to bring into greater visibility a cacophony of speech forms not necessarily reducible to the question of relative autonomy (see Gitlin 1998).

Social Erotics, Erotic Sociality

Our theorization of erotics critically engages social constructionist and poststructuralist theories of subjectivity, sexuality, and desire.[8] Erotics are thoroughly and irretrievably entangled with the *socius*, shot through with the poetics and politics of difference, shaped by the imagination, and fueled by fantasies (Bataille 1986; Vance 1991; Weston 1998). Extending beyond sex acts or desires for sex acts, they are often flashpoints for multiplex social tensions (Rubin 1984). Erotics must come into focus through, not despite, their linkages to the social, the economic, the geopolitical, and so on. Situated at the "intersection of the psychic and the structural" (Mankekar, this

volume), the erotic is frequently enmeshed in, for instance, yearnings for upward mobility, longings for "the homeland," formulations of nationhood and citizenship, and ruptures of ethnic and racial identity.

Taking the erotic as an object of analysis necessitates being reflexively vigilant about the relationship between epistemology, methodology, and ethics. Drawing on a rich genealogy of feminist and queer scholarship, we reject notions of the erotic as a constant biological substrate that is subsequently shaped by media or, for that matter, by culture (see, for instance, Vance 1991 and Weston 1998, 9). Conceptualizing the erotic in biological terms has had implications for how some scholars have theorized sexuality and "ranked" societies and cultures. It has enabled the evolutionary classification of societies such that "the way that a group handles eroticism becomes a marker of social (dis)organization and evolutionary advance" (Weston 1998, 17, 18). The political consequences of such a paradigm are far reaching, particularly when they converge with racist representations of racial and cultural Others. This can be clearly seen in the discourses surrounding the "Hottentot Venus," which ascribed evolutionary difference to purported discrepancies in anatomy that, in turn, were translated into representations of hypersexuality (Gilman 1985).

Theoretical frameworks that explore sexuality and erotics in terms of "sameness" or "difference" have tended to either pose sexuality as a "natural universal" or overemphasize alterity and exoticism (Manderson and Jolly 1997, 1). These approaches are ethnocentric in that they raise the question of whose vantage point should be used to adjudge sameness and difference. Theorizing erotics entails acknowledging the heterogeneity of erotic valuations within and across particular cultural and historical contexts. This is exemplified by Zhang's study (this volume), which shows how the seeking out of clinical care for sexual health and dysfunction is eroticized through a radio advice program, made popular by the mere fact that the explicit discussion of sexual functioning carries a pleasurable transgressive value because it goes against the grain of earlier decades of Maoist silence. Martin Manalansan (this volume) likewise explores an instance of situatedness in which "wayward erotics" emerges in the act of return of Filipino queers to the Philippines: wayward erotics involves "insubordinate or recalcitrant forms of practices . . . forms of erotics that refuse or deflect being anchored to linear, romantic directionality and simplistic filial links to homelands." Dell's chapter engages a topic that continues to be taboo even in liberal discussions of sexuality and sexual normativity: the erotics of childhood and children in an Other place, namely, Sonagachi, a red light district in Kolkata

(formerly Calcutta). As Dell argues, *Born into Brothels* illustrates the complex and contradictory discourses surrounding children of sex workers: as it situates the children in a landscape of erotic excess, the film is also "a plea for a 'return' to normative innocence, even while it delivers erotic access" (this volume).

We build on critiques within queer theory of a unilinear trajectory of the "globalization" of queer sexualities from the West to the rest of the world (see also Cohen 1995; Jackson 1997; Martin et al. 2008; Morris 1994; Rofel 2007a; and Tan 1995). In his groundbreaking analysis of globalizing discourses of gay liberation, Manalansan has described how, in the "shadow" of Stonewall, emancipatory narratives of gay liberation tended to privilege Western definitions of same-sex practices and marginalize or cast as premodern or unliberated non-Western modalities of same-sex desire (1997, 486).[9] Similarly, Gayatri Gopinath has critiqued assumptions within some strains of queer theory that present "colonial constructions of Asian sexualities as anterior, premodern, and in need of Western political development—constructions that are recirculated by contemporary gay and lesbian transnational politics" (1997, 473–74). With a different approach, but not unlike Sara Friedman's scrupulous ethnography of disparate film audiences (this volume), Gopinath's project clears a space for embracing sexualities and erotic desires "at odds" with conventional Euroamerican narratives: her analysis of Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* and Shyam Selvadurai's novel *Funny Boy* foregrounds how these texts refuse to "subscribe to the notion that the proper manifestation of same-sex eroticism is within a 'politics of visibility' in the public sphere" (1997, 482). She argues that, in a South Asian context, "what constitutes 'lesbian' desire may both look and function differently than it does within Euroamerican social and historical formations, and draw from alternative modes of masculinity and femininity" (Gopinath 1997, 482).

Erotic Contests: Articulations of Race, Nation, Gender, and Sex

One theme that recurs here is that of contestations around national, racial, and ethnic affiliation, and around normativities and transgressions that associate specific sexualities with certain ethnic, racial, or national formations and exclude others from rubrics of belonging. Some of these practices resonate with older legacies of representing Asia as the site of the sexual exotic. Early explorer, missionary, colonial, and anthropological descriptions sketched Asian sites as abounding in cultures of sexual excess, immorality, perversion, and repression (Bleys 1995; Jolly 1997; Reed 1997). Then, as Ann Stoler has so incisively recounted, post-Orientalist critique gener-

ated a Freudian model of Europe's relation to the Orient: "A profusion of literary and historical studies have catalogued the wide range of sexual and gendered metaphors in which the feminized colonies, and the women in them, were to be penetrated, raped, silenced, and (dis)possessed" (1997, 32). Later images, perduring into the present, focus on the Asian sex trade, made famous through the Vietnam War and U.S. military bases in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines (Manderson 1997; see also Dell, this volume), and on Asia as sending site for trafficked women in labor, sex work, and marriages (Tolentino 1996), amounting to a troping of Asia as what Lynn Thiesmeyer has called the "West's comfort women" (1999). These racial regimes of representation have spilled over to diasporic Western and gay Asian contexts, holding constant the image of the Asian as hyperfeminine (whether male or female) and variously hypersexual or hyposexual (D. Eng 1996; Fung 1991; Shimizu 2007). Foregrounding the heterogeneous positionalities of Asians as cultural producers, critics, and desiring subjects revises the imagery of "the colonies as a site for the 'revenge of the repressed,' an open terrain for European male ejaculations curtailed in the West" (Stoler 1997, 33), and of Asians as compulsorily heterosexual or erotically restrained, or both.[10] This perspective dovetails with the sexuality studies scholarship now being produced in Asia, as found in the groundbreaking work of Taiwan-based Josephine Ho on transsexuals, pornography, sex workers, and other sexuality rights issues; as published in journals such as *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*; and in the proceedings of the First International Conference of Asian Queer Studies held in Bangkok in July 2005.[11]

Mindful of the dangers of producing gender-blind analyses of the sexual, our essays take up the fraught relationship between discourses of gender and of erotics. On the one hand, the erotic is centrally implicated in the construction of hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity. Our contributors analyze how, for instance, Westerners' imaginaries about Eastern femininities range from the transgressively erotic (Dell) to the titillating (Allison) to the submerged or even disavowed insinuation of erotics (Constable). Meanwhile, cultural nationalisms can be coimplicated with discourses of appropriately gendered sexuality. In India, transnational television centrally participates in the reconfiguration of notions of "Indian" womanhood indexed in part by sexual propriety (Mankekar). Conversely, children in Kolkata who are, allegedly, "born into brothels" promote a voyeuristic erotic othering of their mothers' excess (Dell).

At the same time that linkages between the politics of desire and the politics of gender need to be foregrounded, sexuality struggles cannot be subsumed entirely under gender politics (here we follow Rubin 1993; Sedgwick 1993; Vance 1984; and others). Relatedly, privileging erotics over the politics of sexuality risks underestimating the very serious concerns associated with sexual "danger" (Vance 1984). For Asia, these loom large, if we think about the practices of coerced military prostitution or "comfort women" historically, as well as the extent of contemporary sexual exploitation both within Asia and transnationally, if we think of the epidemic proportions of HIV and AIDS in some Asian sites and its terrible silencing in others, if we think of restrictions on reproductive control for women, whether in pronatalist or antinatalist societies, or if we think of the rise in polygynous and concubinage-type partnerships associated with the transnationalization of Asian capital.[12] And certain Asian *men* are not immune from related dangers such as serious rates of STDs in some sex-work locations and fierce reprisals for same-sex desire.[13]

Yet we wish to remain alert to the risks of colluding with longstanding tropes of feminized Asia as ever sexual quarry and victim (see Harrison 2001). We queer this picture by exploring instead some of the more quirky and indeterminate contours of Asian erotics, acknowledging that they are formed in the crucible of all of the above. To emphasize such a situated erotics, of course, is not to repaint Asians as indiscriminate pleasure-seekers. Indeed, many of the analyses included in this volume, especially those by Constable and Schein, depict women as hedged around with sexual messages that call out desires that they, in turn, refuse.

Rethinking "Asia"

Our insistence on the cultural and historical specificity of erotic desire undergirds our concern with how Asia is produced—both in popular cultural representations of transnational media and in our scholarly analyses. Ongoing discussions within and outside the U.S. academy about the changing constitution of area studies and, in particular, Asian studies form the intellectual context for our interventions. Several scholars have traced the institutionalization of area studies in the United States to a "larger Cold War liberal project for the conceptualization of global as well as local differences" (Rafael 1997, 92).[14] The institutionalization of area studies was embedded in the new imperial vision the United States had of itself as peacekeeper and arbiter of international conflicts: area knowledges were to equip America for

this task. Area studies in the United States have also been linked with efforts to formulate liberal, pluralist conceptions of citizenship in the post–Second World War era, in response to the question of how (elite) U.S. citizens could prepare themselves for their ascendant leadership role in the world.

Certainly, neither Asia nor Asian studies have been singular or static. Extending an important debate on the production of Asia as a region and as an epistemological category over the last two centuries, Prasenjit Duara examines Asia "as a region of our times" by drawing on perspectives in historical sociology and the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991). He points out that Asia, as a region and a product of regionalization, has followed "hegemonic modes of spatial production," in particular, those of imperial regionalism, anti-imperialist projects of regionalization, post–Second World War conjunctures (including the Cold War), and the circulation of populations (2010, 963). The form and content of Asian studies have varied in different parts of the world. Note, for instance, the heterogeneity of genealogies, political canons, intellectual agendas, and preoccupations of Asian studies in the United States, Europe, Australia, and academic sites across Asia. Indeed, as several Asia-based scholars argue, analyses of the discursive production and deconstruction of Asia have a rich genealogy within specific and diverse intellectual traditions within Asia, and have played a foundational role in the formation of the vibrant field of critical Asian studies. For instance, Sun Ge situates the discursive "unpacking" of Asia within a longer genealogy of Japanese intellectual history and relates it to shifting trajectories of Japanese nationalism at different historical moments (2000). Wang Hui points to "ambiguity and contradictions in the idea of Asia," asserting: "The idea [of Asia] is at the same time colonialist and anti-colonialist, conservative and revolutionary, nationalist and internationalist, originating in Europe and shaping Europe's image of itself, closely related to visions of both nation-state and empire, a notion of non-European civilization, and a geographic category established through geopolitical relations" (2007, 27). More recently, Wang Hui has insisted that we bring a comparativist perspective to the project of historicizing Asia. Hui insists that problematizing assumptions about Asia must "reexamine the notion of Europe" (2010, 986).

We proceed, then, from the premise that Asia is an unstable signifier that, in the words of Yan Hairong and Daniel Vukovich, is mobilized by "multiple social imaginaries and enlisted in the imperialist projects of the United States and Japan, as well as by various anticolonial movements, alliances, and revolutions" (2007, 211). Asia defies romanticization as resistant to capi-

tal or empire: the revival of the Bandung spirit and the resilience of progressive academic and activist networks based on South-South collaborations exist *alongside* the efflorescence of Asian nation-states that are major hubs for the movement of global capital. As Yan and Vukovich argue, "While we cannot escape rethinking the question of Asia, we also can neither reduce Asia to certain Western historical imaginaries nor invoke an essential, ontologically pure Asia as self-evident, self-sufficient, and self-made" (2007, 212).[15] A conceptualization of Asia as a "mobile, changing collection of spaces that never settle absolutely inside any fixed boundaries" (Ludden 2003, 1069; see also Sun Ge 2000, 5) resonates with our own interests in the (re)production of Asia through the transnational mediation of erotics.

Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly insist that, rather than look for "exotic erotic" practices unique to Asia and the Pacific, we should interrogate erotics in terms of "cross-cultural exchanges in sexualities—exchanges of meanings as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies" (1997, 1). Drawing on the pioneering work of Edward Said (1979), Rani Kabbani (1986), Malek Alloula (1986), and others, on the place of the erotic in representations of racial and cultural Others, we ask how our modes of knowledge production about erotics, the epistemological and theoretical frameworks we deploy, converge with, reinforce, or contest the ways Asia is discursively constituted. As Roger Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo have cautioned, we need to avoid an "identity political" framing, not simply because it "asserts the transhistorical and cross-cultural existence of only *certain* global identities" but, more importantly, because this "denies the history and historicity . . . of the widely varying ways sexualities have been understood and practiced" (1997, 5). Our interest here lies in exploring how transnational media's role in constituting erotics implicates the production of Asia as a "field" of popular representation, research, and knowledge production.[16]

Hence we invoke an Asia in medias res, always in production. We conceive of Asia as an assemblage of ideas, histories, and images, the very construction of which is haunted by heterogeneous legacies and memories of empire, and vastly different histories of racialization (compare Said 1979; Lowe 1991; and Morley and Robins 1995 for a similar unpacking of "Europe"). How do these varied, discrepant entanglements with the past shape transnational cultural productions in the current historical moment? How do these discontinuous histories inflect cultural productions by Asians themselves? As we have suggested, despite the enduring power of colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial discourses of racialization, cultural difference, and moder-

nity that circulate about and within Asia, neither Asia nor Asians can be reduced to objects of a dominant "Western gaze." Thus, for instance, in her book *The Hypersexuality of Race*, Celine Parreñas Shimizu analyzes the films *101 Asian Debutantes* and *Good Woman of Bangkok* to explore how Southeast Asian prostitutes use their bodies to speak back "in defiance of representation." By complicating the agency of these women, Shimizu presents them as not "simply overdetermined by race and economics, but [as] subjects who engage technologies of the visual and the sexual in order to write themselves into the historical record" (2007, 225).

Moreover, even when the West assumes a spectral presence in debates surrounding transnational media (and, more broadly, globalization), we cannot assume the totalizing power or the singularity of the so-called Western gaze. In this volume, we juxtapose media texts about Asia constructed in the West with those constructed within Asia and its diasporas in order to draw out the discursive continuities and discontinuities that cut across them. In several instances—for example, in the case of Hmong producers of video, Indonesian publishers of *gay* and *lesbi* zines, and children in Kolkata wielding loaned cameras—Asian men and women seize the means of representation. While this does not automatically shield them from deploying racialized or Orientalizing forms of representation, it complicates any reductive understanding of Asians as always-already victims of an objectifying Western gaze. And, in the case described by Constable, Filipina and Chinese women involved in correspondence courtship resist what Ara Wilson (1988, 119) called the "rhetorical vulnerability" of catalogue brides, countering their objectifying representations as erotic objects by presenting themselves as complex persons, and in turn rejecting "sterile market analogies and views of themselves as commodities" (Constable, this volume).

New Media

The rise of new media technologies pushes us further in rethinking the dynamics by which "Asians" are constructed and negotiated. Asians have occupied highly spectacularized positions in relation to the technologies of new media. Three key figures of representation have been salient—the docile nimble-fingered laborer in computer-assembly sweatshops, the gendered object of orientalist desire as accessed either through virtual courtship or through pornographic representation in cyberspace, and the border-crossing cyborgian geek, with access to special, H-1B visa status in the United States thanks to his extraordinary high-tech proficiencies.[17] A telling contradiction, a doubleness to Asia, persists in these regimes of representation: on

the one hand, Asia appears as mired in the poverty that produces a surfeit of laborers, brides, and sex workers, while on the other hand, Asians—whether as transnational techies or as Asia-based corporations—are seen as garnering disproportionate profits from production of media electronics.

A debate has raged in commentary on the potentialities of digital image-making (Gonzalez 2003) and the Internet (Daniels 2009b; Gonzalez 2009; Turkle 1995). Is it a virtual space where bodied identities such as race and gender are deconstructed and evaded, so fluid as to be insignificant?[18] Or is it a site where, through intense visual and textual productivity, such identities are made hypervisible and, indeed, become a crucial medium of social process in such arenas as gaming and avatars, advertising, music videos, and Internet dating (Nakamura 2002, 2007)? What makes visual identities mean? Indeed, how do visualizations of humans come to signify identities (Hansen 2004)?

Theorizations have not taken up geographic identities to nearly the degree that they have entertained race and gender, but the questions clearly transfer. The geospaces of Asia are increasingly unbordered by the rhizomic movements of digital communications, but at the same time we see an almost viral intensification of the imaging of Asian places that stands to further stabilize the region as the longstanding Other it has characteristically been. Ryan Bishop and Lillian S. Robinson (2002) analyze how this process plays out through the posting of Internet commentary about Western sex tourists' erotic exploits overseas. Lisa Nakamura (2003) shows how idealized orientalist images are held constant in IBM ads, in order to emphasize the way universal computer languages penetrate these otherwise ossified spaces.

But new media communications have not only exacerbated these images through multiplying them in cyberspace. They have also proliferated venues for challenging prevailing tropes. For instance, the activist scholar Kristina Wong has created a mock mail-order bride website designed to "subvert the expectations of a nasty guy in search of petite naked Asian bodies" (Hudson 2007, 4–5) by confronting them with grotesque images and threatening counternarratives offered by Asian women. Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu describes several digital porn productions by Asians that "break open the seamless flow of information that presents women's historical conditions as historical necessities" (2003, 277). On the other side, Western men seeking correspondence marriages, as documented by Constable (this volume), actively seek to defy their own imaging as erotically exploitative through their own online textual production—shared primarily with each other. All these examples suggest roles that new media have played in constructing and com-

plicating "Asia," underscoring that scholars of Asian studies need to figure media prominently in critical research designs.

Geopolitical Desires

Even as media have wrought profound transformations in and beyond Asia, it would be foolhardy to overprivilege media as the exclusive engines of erotic encounter and change. Sexual interaction, as Stoler (1991) has most persuasively argued, was transforming Asia from the earliest moments of colonialism, and certainly can be argued to have been significantly present in even earlier eras of exploration and trade (Bleys 1995). To be convinced of how deep and wide sexual engagements have been both historically and spatially, one need only recall the musings of women from highland New Guinea about gold prospectors they slept with in the classic documentary *First Contact* (Connolly and Anderson 1982) or the accounts of Trobrianders on the undesirability of the missionary position, described in Bronislaw Malinowski's *Sexual Life of Savages* (1929). But a model of contact, of erotic billiard balls knocking up against one another, misses the point. Echoing Vincanne Adams and Stacey Pigg, we insist on moving "beyond this tendency to let 'cultural difference' formulate theory; rather, we focus on how sexualities are constituted in and through projects that blur the boundaries between cultures, norms and moralities" (2005, 7).

Beyond the much-touted European colonial projects, other intra-Asian engagements, such as Japanese imperialism and the institution of comfort women (Tanaka 2002), have likewise shifted sex from being bounded by locality to being constituted out of cross-national interchanges. Transnational media can be seen as in some ways extending these interchanges, as producing an intensification of mobile messages, images, notions around sex, rather than bodies in contact per se. Media facilitate the pace of mobility of erotics around the globe. And media are sometimes agents for bringing bodies into contact. The Internet as a dating or marriage vehicle is, of course, the best example of this, but there are other examples, such as Schein's study of Hmong media production practices that precipitate sexual encounters (this volume). Drawing on and extending a growing literature on the globalization and racialization of sexuality, developed mostly in queer studies (Altman 2001; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; D. L. Eng 2001; Harper et al. 1997; Manalansan 2003; Nagel 2003; Patton and Sanchez-Eppler 2000; Povinelli and Chauncey 1999), we systematically demonstrate the heterogeneous ways that transnational media enable and, at times, accelerate these processes.

Bodies of Longing

FANTASY

Tracing the work of media in the production and regulation of erotics requires that we also take seriously the realm of fantasy: as Slavoj Žižek points out, "Through fantasy, we learn 'how to desire.'" Fantasies provide the "coordinates" of our desire, and also constitute—rather than fulfill or satisfy—desire (1989, 118). At the same time, it is important to affirm that fantasies, including erotic fantasies, are hardly unmoored from social and historic context. Foregrounding the social and political consequentiality of fantasy, Allison reminds us that "fantasy is not mere or random escapist fantasy, as the term is often used colloquially, but rather is constituted in relationship to the specific milieus in which people live and to which they refer even when constructing imaginary worlds" (1996, 124–25).[19] Indeed, beyond existing milieus, some have argued that mediated erotic fantasy even stands to be a destabilizing social force (Hunt 1993; Arvidsson 2007).

But what are the kinds of fantasies generated by transnational media? Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis assert that "fantasy . . . is not the object of desire, but its setting" (1986, 26). This applies as much to media produced on a smaller scale, such as videos and zines, as it does to electronic media like the Internet and Western-produced mass media, such as Hollywood cinema. How are these potentialities for fantasy fashioned and refashioned as they travel across diverse mediascapes and geographies of the imagination? And how can we tease apart the intentionalities of media producers, who may be operating with instrumental motives for the production of fantasy (marketing, morality, political-ideological discipline, health education, etc.), from the unruly and capricious phenomena of reception where all manner of unorthodox and unscripted responses may generate fantasy material? Fantasy, then, might be at once informed by but also disjunctive with top-down media messages. It is a space where dominant codes may be resignified, either playfully or oppositionally.

The extent to which our fantasies are both suffused with and generated by media problematizes our understanding of the putative boundaries between self and society, inside and outside. Boellstorff warns against "implicit theories of agency that underlie many descriptions of mass-mediated erotics, desire, and pleasure in Asia (and elsewhere). Again and again, a presocial erotic, desiring, pleasuring self is granted an assumed ontological priority: flipping open the newspaper, surfing the Web, and then secondarily entering into a transformative relationship with the mass media in ques-

tion" (2003b, 23). In contrast, our conceptualizations of media, erotics, and subjectivity are mutually implicated. For instance, we are interested in how erotics spawn culturally—and historically—specific modalities of personhood and subjecthood and thereby problematize assumptions of an "individuated subject of sexuality" (Manderson and Jolly 1997, 24). At the same time, attending to different modalities of subjectivity informs how we conceive of mediated erotics.

If, as noted earlier, our fantasies are "specific to the milieus" in which we imagine our worlds, so too are the forms taken by erotic desire. The media we investigate in this volume enjoin us to suspend any bounded or determinate notion of what comprises erotic texts. Does erotic involvement in media recognize borders between sexual and nonsexual representation? Ethnographic engagement tells us again and again that only by apprehending episodic and indeterminate meanings at discrete moments of reception can we even begin to recognize patterns, however contingent, in the production of erotics. Sara Friedman's chapter in this volume deftly suggests homosocial as well as lesbian fantasies of social relations distributed across *Twin Bracelets*' film viewership. Constable examines how the American men and Filipina and Chinese women who enter into relationships through their membership in online networks refuse to subsume the complicated desires surrounding correspondence marriages within erotics and foreground instead the realm of heterosexual domesticity through marriage, as well as other longings, for fidelity, upward mobility, and financial and emotional security, shaping the aspirations and practices of her informants.

AFFECT, BODY, DESIRE

The dynamics of the interplay between media and erotics compels a rethinking of concepts such as "structure of feeling" (R. Williams 1974) and "emotion talk" (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990) that imply dominant discourses triggering subjective states through structured meanings. Media consumption, in its less logocentric characteristics, its sensory multidimensionality, which often privileges the visual, the aural, and even the haptic (Deleuze 1989; Marks 2000), cannot be reduced to a process of the structuring of emotions.[20] As Brian Massumi suggests, this latter process bestows priority onto the already encoded "ideological master structure" that inscribes, indeed codes, the body in predictable, and legible, fashion. In much media consumption, however, not only does the body become involved, but these moments of what we might call affect efface distinctions between the psychic, the cognitive, and the corporeal. Pornography is, of course, the most

apparent example of this, but, as Linda Williams (1991) has pointed out, other genres, such as the tearjerker and the horror story, likewise necessarily implicate the visceral in complex entanglement with meaning and ideology.

At an even more fundamental level, mediated erotics challenge us to rethink the bodily in delineating what is the erotic. What would it mean to think incorporeal erotics? Andy Miah has suggested this for cybersex which "presents a form of engagement that challenges conventional understandings of sex as a fundamentally bodily engagement with others" (2002, 363). Phone sex and cyber sex, of course, present comparable challenges, as does the solitary consumption of print pornography. By training our lens on media erotics, we broaden this inquiry, asking what forms of interpersonal relations, including sexual and corporeal or not, might be brought into being, perhaps even across great physical distances, through participation in mediated worlds? Fields of corporeality and materiality are necessarily fraught and unclearly demarcated; desires for sexual encounters intertwine with those for commodities or lifestyles (see Wiggins 2000), likewise pushing the limits of what is thought of as corporeal. Desires for medical normalcy, or for freedom from pain, intermingle with erotic knowledges gleaned, in Zhang's instance (this volume), from a Chinese radio talk show voice. The quality of this voice produces its own sensory effects, effects that are inflected by memory, for the softness of the voice is pleasurable precisely because of how it contrasts with harsh, broadcast voices of the Maoist era.

Following Massumi's emphasis on movement, on "process before signification or coding" (2003, 7), it becomes urgent, then, to be attentive to the social life of bodied media consumption. It is not only about already individuated subjects in dyadic relation with media texts, nor is it only about how enclosed subjects are internally changed through relating to media. If, as Sara Ahmed (2004, 120) holds, signs accrue affective value as an effect of their movement, it becomes increasingly important to chart the transnational circulation not only of media forms themselves but also of the affective economies in which they participate. How, then, does the intensification of affect through the circulation, the rubbing up against each other, of certain signs implicate social process? Media can be said to move subjects, and in turn to spawn movements of persons across space and into new social relations. The double meaning of "move"—as both emotive and spatial—is crucial here, as Arjun Appadurai pointed out early on in making the connection between the social practice of imagination and decisions about migration (1996; see also Mankekar 2008, 153–54). This process is deftly illustrated in Karen Kelsky's study of the way the iconography of Western men

that circulated in Japan helped to inspire Japanese women's cultivation of what she calls "internationalist desire" (2001, 133).

In the process of the circulation of signs and the creation of nodes of intensified affect, other social effects are inherent. Both relationality (Massumi) and borders (Ahmed) are produced in these mobilities. By relationality, Massumi connotes a kind of radical openness, a potentiality for something new to emerge through interactions: "Relationality is the potential for singular effects of qualitative change to occur in excess over or as a supplement to objective interactions" (2003, 225). With the circulation of signs in media mobilities, there persists the possibility for unpredictable instances of coming-together: it is not that signs impose their uniform script everywhere they travel, but rather that each moment of reception, in its sensory and affective density, contains the possibility of new meanings and movements. One of the potential outcomes, in Ahmed's formulation, is the alignment of subjects with collectivities and the concomitant production of social boundaries (2004, 117). Media and their consumption are crucial not only in reinforcing communities but also in producing unanticipated forms of belonging. Extending these lines of thought, it becomes clear how mediated erotics, particularly with its intense involvement of the body, might generate desiring subjects in relation to new objects of desire.

Erotic Knowledges: Epistemologies, Methods, and Ethics

Our contributors proceed from diverse epistemological frameworks in their theorization of media erotics. Indeed, we posit that studying erotics and transnational media calls for a creative formulation of transdisciplinary frameworks in synergistic articulation with anthropological ethnography. Just as there is no universal definition of erotics, there is no set or singular "method" of study. Our methodological choices are shaped by the objects and subjects of our enquiry and not by disciplinary training or affiliation. Hence, we reflexively stretch and bend "classic" ethnographic methods of participant observation and interviewing in conjunction with textual and discursive readings.[21]

Our contributors sometimes talk to informants about media and sex, and at other times variously watch and listen alongside and over shoulders (Geertz 1973a, 452), participate in mediated communications, engage texts themselves through interpreting them and through charting their conversations with other texts, document the production process, follow texts to different sites of consumption, and follow media producers and consumers

in their own peregrinations. Many of these followings might be described as what Schein (2002, 231) has called "itinerant ethnography," a method that is "in spirit siteless," focusing on transient, episodic aggregations of people and on constant mobilities of persons and media products.

Our intention in this volume is both to investigate transnational media and, as we noted earlier, to construct a transnational analytics; hence, instead of formulating a comparative approach based on the compilation of diverse instantiations of erotics, we explore the transnational connections undergirding the mediation of erotics in Asia and beyond.[22] What are some of the ways this transnational analytics can be constructed? One strategy would be to borrow from George Marcus's (1998) suggestions to conduct multisited fieldwork and to "follow the thing"—or, as in our case, to follow particular media as they make their way across the world. But there are pitfalls to conceiving of media and culture as ontologically separate or cultures as systemically distinct from each other. Such questions of difference run head on into anxieties about the allegedly homogenizing effects of globalization.

The methodological and epistemological politics inherent in the production of erotic knowledges about cultural Others are fraught, as is evident in Dell's juxtaposition of the truth claims of a documentary film produced by a Western journalist with those of Durbar, an activist organization that has long struggled for the rights and empowerment of sex workers in Kolkata, as well as her own voice as activist-scholar. How can she mobilize the alternative vantage point of a local sex-worker organization to counter a Western demonization of Asian prostitutes without in turn reifying activists' knowledge production as the authentic truth of those still-Other Asians? Manalansan's analysis of the interpretations of the film *Miguel/Michelle* on the part of viewers in New York and Manila suggests one alternative to the reification of cultural difference risked in "following" a text across different cultures. Rejecting the notion that these interpretive communities are "anchored to place," Manalansan analyzes the "increasing interconnections and traffic between the two sites in order to dislodge the idea of 'distinct' communities" by foregrounding how "people are increasingly 'in transit' both in imagination and fantasy and actual physical travel" (this volume). Similarly, Friedman's analysis of the film *Twin Bracelets* and its reception among interpretive communities in the United States, Taiwan, and China stresses discursive disjunctures in the intelligibility of same-sex erotics that cut across these different sites. Media mobility emerges as key to these ana-

lytical strategies and Dell's move of putting Durbar's knowledges in transnational circulation alongside those of the award-winning documentary can be seen as one tactic of such transnational mobility.

QUESTIONS OF TEXTUALITY

Cultural studies perspectives developed at the University of Birmingham have been particularly inspiring to those of us concerned with developing theoretical approaches that embrace the myriad sociocultural implications of popular texts.[23] While we do not by any means seek to delineate or define a single or singular "model" of cultural studies, several of our contributors deploy what we might broadly describe as cultural studies approaches to the relationship between textuality and sociality. In this approach, popular culture is conceptualized as the "site" and "stake" of cultural struggles, as "the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured" (S. Hall 1981, 239). Texts, broadly construed, are intimately imbricated with cultural struggle, the politics of the popular and the public, and the everyday lives of ordinary men and women. With these considerations in mind, we seek to expand the fruitful, albeit tense, interface between anthropology and cultural studies.

At the same time that we decenter an exclusive focus on media texts, we take seriously their materiality—their form, the representational strategies they deploy, their modes of address, and the semiotic and discursive repertoires that they draw upon. Allison, for example, sensitively traces the narrative and rhetorical strategies—the "architectonics of distant intimacy"—deployed in *Memoirs of a Geisha* that lend it such a powerful aura of authenticity. Similarly, Dell interrogates the effects of visual texts, examining such cinematographic and editing techniques as the use of darkness and light in terms of how they might play on audience imaginaries.

Attending to the transnational mediation of erotics also requires that we take seriously questions of enunciation (Mercer 1991, 181). Our conception of enunciation, again, is not circumscribed by authorial intention. For instance, Allison holds *Memoirs of a Geisha* in tension with three other texts that also explore the erotic attraction of Japan and the Japanese for Westerners: Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (1910), Alessandro Baricco's novel *Silk* (1997), and John Treat's *Great Mirrors Shattered* (1999). By tracing the continuities and discontinuities across these three texts, Allison situates the "epistemological erotics" of *Memoirs* in an intertextual field in which genres and temporalities mingle without melding. In this manner, even as she analyzes the authorial intentions implicit in the text's deployment of rhetorical strategies,

Allison contextualizes the passionate responses of its readers by situating them within larger narrative traditions that have been produced in the West (and, ostensibly, targeted at Western readers) of heterosexual erotic liaisons between Western men and Japanese women. Nor, as we note earlier, are the texts and discourses produced by Asians immune to self-Orientalizing or to the dangers of self-objectification. Examining the politics of enunciation, therefore, consists of analyzing a text's mode of address as imbricated with the multiple discursive contexts from which it has emerged and of which it is a constitutive part. Contexts, in turn, far from being a solid, unchanging "backdrop" to media texts, are historically contingent and in part media-generated.[24]

Interrogating the complex and sometimes unpredictable ways viewers/consumers/readers approach particular texts is consistent with what V. N. Voloshinov (1986) has described as the multiaccentuality of signs. We cannot reduce reception to empiricist or positivist simplifications of what a text "really means" to audiences.[25] Our contributors present a range of methodological strategies for analyzing the multiple ways transnational texts acquire meaning for their audiences/viewers/consumers. Against an "abstracted notion" of spectatorship, Manalansan examines the embodied character of the reception of *Miguel/Michelle*, while Judith Farquhar and Zhang insist on folding questions of historical consciousness and temporality into their explorations of the pleasures consumers might derive from health discourses.

ETHNOTEXTUAL READING

Some of our methodological strategies might fall under the rubric of what Schein has called an "ethnotextual" method (this volume). An ethnotextual approach emerges from the fraught intersections, as contentious as they have been productive, of anthropology and literary and cultural studies. Inverting the originary Geertzian disciplinary position that cultures should be thought of as texts that could be read and interpreted as literatures would be, ethnotextuality asserts that texts—in the case of this volume, media texts—should be encountered as cultures to which a panoply of interpretive and analytical approaches can be applied. Such approaches are already finely honed in the genealogy of ethnographic production that has concerned itself with what are more commonly recognized as cultural practices but, in large part because of the durability of disciplinary turf concerns, have not been authorized as applicable by anthropologists to textual materials, whether visual or verbal. Drawing on crucial insights from the reflexive and dialogic moments

in anthropology, ethnotextuality entails a decided sense of the ethnographer's involvement in meaning-making and of the necessity of that involvement being one of ongoing engagement, interlocution, even struggle over signification. E. Valentine Daniel has described this move as "the translation of cultural texts into contextured texts" and the replacement of "the quest for 'epistemological certainties' with 'edifying conversations' between self and Other" (1996, 11). In the most literal operationalization of this, Schein, Friedman, and others orchestrate directed dialogues about particular clips as a mode of media research.

It is far too positivist a conceit to presume that we can extract directly from our informants' narratives all we need in order to understand the significations of media. Describing her encounter with two men poring over an illustrated sexual disease textbook in a bookstore, Farquhar muses: "Anthropologists are supposed to be able to ask people why they do things. When we do, and when people will talk to us, we tend to privilege the answers we get as if they were the authentic voice of the people. But in this situation, had I asked, even had I known these two men and established some form of (anthropologically fabled) rapport with them, what could they have told me about their reading process?" (this volume). Recognizing this quandary, we seek greater nuance in unpacking the subtlety by which media texts not only make meanings, but incite desires, shape identities, fashion emotions, implant fantasies, and so on. They do this, of course, in part through straightforward signification, and also through affect, the senses, and the unconscious.

Just as it is not sufficient to simply ask audiences what texts mean to them, neither is it as simple as reading subjectivity off of dominant discourses, or even off of much less powered texts, such as some of the media forms we examine here. Such readings represent excesses of textuality. What ethnographers can bring to these approaches, instead, is a finely textured enmeshment that performs readings only in the course of immersive interaction with those other readers about whom we seek to write. It means taking these texts seriously in terms of their multiple and contradictory effects and appealing to our own subjectivities for additional interpretive insight beyond what informants can speak. Ethnotextuality is in part about consuming together; and it is also about taking reading and reception seriously as inchoate practices that cannot necessarily be narrated, that eschew conscious tracking, that involve intense affect, and that implicate visuality and the body. Because these modes of reception cannot always be described self-reflexively by informants, it is incumbent upon the ethnographer to en-

counter texts directly, to let those texts play upon the subjectivity of the ethnographer as well, and to perform critical interpretation on the basis of an ethnographic sensibility in which one's subjectivity is intricately entangled with those of informants and is inflected by their concerns.

THE UNRESEARCHABLE EROTIC

A related set of methodological issues arise in fashioning research on erotics (and, indeed, on countererotics). In her incisive critique of the "documentary imperative" undergirding the reductively empiricist focus on sexual acts in canonical ethnographies of sexuality, Kath Weston argues that these approaches are preoccupied with gathering data on the sexual behavior of cultural and racial Others without adequately theorizing sexuality (1998, 6–7). Such an approach risks representing cultural and racial Others as evidencing a naturalized and universal sex drive or, alternatively, as manifesting exotic sexual behavior that indexes and reinforces their radical alterity. Abstracting sexual practices from social life (and thus deploying what Weston, drawing on the work of Henrika Kuklick [1997], describes as "the flora-and-fauna approach") tends to foster "a mistaken impression of social science research on sexuality as an overwhelmingly empirical project. Empirical it has been and must be, but not without an edge that is simultaneously moral, theoretical, political, and analytical" (1998, 11).

Indeed, the forms of erotics that we seek to understand are rarely straightforwardly accessed through interviews and are, for the most part, inimical to direct observation.[26] As ethnographers, we necessarily pay close attention to what our research subjects say and do. Yet we supplement with a nonlogocentric approach that relies on more extensive practices of interpretation. For instance, Mankekar describes how her ethnographic practice was inflected by her focus on the relationship between media, the erotic, and the realm of fantasy. Shortly after beginning ethnographic fieldwork on this topic she found that she had to learn to listen to her informants' "silences, hesitations, and discursive detours" and "go beyond the verbal, the discursive, and the visible." When she was able to do so, she found "surreptitious commentaries" being made on issues of sexuality and morality in a wide variety of contexts (this volume).

Questions about methods necessarily raise questions about ethics. Weston's concerns about the risks of the "documentary imperative" in some studies of sexual behaviors and habits foregrounds the dangers of voyeurism entailed not only in how we write about erotics, but also in the means by which we obtain and produce knowledges about erotics. Conventional

social science methods of survey research, interviewing, and participant-observation seem inappropriate and intrusive, if not egregiously offensive, in many of the cultural and social contexts in which we work. Several of our contributors reflect on the fraught ethical and methodological spaces they negotiate in their research. Constable notes how her own position as "observer observed" was brought to a crisis: worries expressed by some members that she might negatively represent their "cross-border" alliances forced her to withdraw from one Internet community. Dell makes clear the stakes when activist work abuts a powerful media text, demanding that the researcher enact an intervention in the form of laying out the consequences of representation and misrepresentation. The issue here is not the field research techniques we can or should use to "get to" our informants' expressions of erotic desires, fantasies, or yearnings. Instead, our concern is with the epistemological and ethical implications of how we formulate our objects of inquiry and interpretation.

Our contributors deploy a range of epistemological and methodological strategies to delve into the indirect, elusive, and elliptical nature of erotics (Allison 1989). Allison formulates the notion of "epistemological erotics" in her analysis of fantasies incited by distance and infused with an intimate familiarity. In addition to observing the reactions of her interviewees—their visible excitement and, in some cases, obvious arousal—as they speak to her about *Memoirs*, she reads erotics through the lens of the allure of fantasies generated by being "transported" to another place and time. Other contributors situate erotics in terms of its intersections with a panoply of yearnings: Dell, by exploring the conjuncture of prurient fascination and moral superiority regarding Kolkata's sex workers; Zhang, by relating erotics to a longing for health and medically defined normality; Boellstorff, by examining how erotic desire articulates with desires for national belonging; and Mankekar, by siting erotics in a larger web of desires engendered by, among other things, yearnings for commodities and for class mobility.

Farquhar's remarks about the difficulty of interpreting the pleasures our informants derive from popular culture seem particularly apt for erotics. What are the kinds of hermeneutics at work in our efforts to represent (or even intuit) the erotic feelings, aspirations, anxieties, and fantasies of our informants? The larger question we wish to raise here is how our own desires are imbricated in our will to knowledge. Allison's critique of the co-implication of erotic desire with desire for knowledge in Treat's *Great Mirrors Shattered* is particularly thought-provoking. She stresses the embodied

nature—the erotic epistemology and epistemological erotics—of the passionate pursuit of knowledge about (cultural, racial, and social) Others.[27] Extrapolating from this critique, we seek to reflect on how our desires might be coimplicated in the "distant intimacy" produced by ethnographic fieldwork and other forms of cultural analysis, and how these desires might shape the entanglements of selves "with and against an other" (Allison, this volume). We cannot always articulate the pleasures we obtain from our own interactions with popular texts; even less can we articulate the pleasures surrounding our erotic longings and fantasies. Hence, in addition to tracing the discursive proliferation of erotics through the fantasies and yearnings incited by transnational media, we strive also to read these instances of mediation against the grain, to trace their gaps and ellipses—and to strain for, listen to, and, ultimately, respect the stutterings, hesitancies, indirections, and silences surrounding erotics.

Notes

1. "AXN Banned for 'Indecent' Programme," *Times of India*, January 18, 2007, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-01-18/india/27879518_1_axn-tv-channels-action-channel.

2. See "Richard Gere Kisses Shilpa Shetty—Riots Ensue," *Jawa Report*, April 17, 2007, http://mypetjawa,mu.nu/archives/. The last two decades have witnessed several other controversies stemming from the erotic recharging of the Indian public sphere. One of the most notorious of these controversies was the protests and violence surrounding the release of the Deepa Mehta film *Fire* in India in 1998. For a range of scholarly analyses of this controversy, see the work of Gopinath (2006), Kapur (2000), and Patel (2004).

3. See "Beijing Prosecutors Drop Charges against Online Nude Chat," *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, April 18, 2007; "China Censors Launch War on Cyberflesh," *Agence France-Presse*, April 13, 2007.

4. See also Boellstorff's analysis of the "crisis of context" in media studies (this volume).

5. See, for instance, Larkin (2000) and Schein (2002); see also Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin (2002, 3).

6. See, for instance, the work of Appadurai (1996), Mankekar (1999), D. Miller (1995), and Wilk (2002) for some analyses of the unforeseen implications of transnational media.

7. Norimitsu Onishi, "China's Youth Look to Seoul for Inspiration," *New York Times*, January 2, 2006, A1, A7.

8. We aim neither to conflate social constructionist and poststructuralist approaches here, nor to stress their similarities more than their differences. Nor do we intend to summarize or synthesize what are voluminous bodies of scholarship. Nevertheless, the scholars whose work has been foundational to our conceptualization of subjectivity,

sexuality, and desire include Butler (1993, 1997, 1999), Foucault (1980), Irigaray (1985), Lacan (1977), Rubin (1984), and Vance (1984).

9. See also Patel's essay (2004) for an excellent critique of such assumptions.

10. Such images are countered, for instance, by the provocative insights of Kelsky on racialization in the erotic desires of Japanese women for Western men (2001).

11. See Ho (1994, 1998, and 2005).

12. For two very different studies of the rise of HIV and AIDS in Japan and China, respectively, see Treat (1999) and Hyde (2007). On AIDS, noncommercial sex, and sex work in Thailand, see Lyttleton's study (2000). For discussions of some of the issues around polygynous and concubinage-type partnerships in relation to health, reproduction, and human rights, see, for instance, essays in the volumes edited by Adams and Pigg (2005) and Hilsdon et al. (2000).

13. See Rofel's essay (2010) on reprisals for selling sex in China.

14. Other critical interventions on this topic include those of Barlow (1993 and 2007), Farquhar and Hevia (1993), Miyoshi and Harootunian (2002), and Cummings (2002).

15. By conceiving of Asia in terms of a critical regionalism that draws intellectual sustenance from the resurgence of academic and activist networks within and beyond Asia (see, for instance, Yan and Vukovich 2007, and Spivak 2008), we join forces with colleagues in critical Asian studies forums within Asia and the United States (see, for instance, interventions published in the journals *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* and *positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*). Yan and Vukovich define critical regionalism in terms of "a reorientation of thought that can resist and provide alternatives to neoliberalism and empire within and across Asia and the world" (2007, 222). Similarly, Spivak insists on conceiving of Asia as a problematic that enables the forging of a nonidentitarian critical regionalism (2008).

16. Compare Rafael's essay (1997) on how area studies knowledges have been perceived as sources for raw material for testing hypotheses and theories.

17. See the work of Biao (2007) and Lee and Wong (2003) for a discussion of these and other imagings of Asians in relation to technology.

18. See Turkle (1995) and, on the notion of the posthuman, Hayles (1999). On race and the Internet, see the work of J. Kang (2003), Nelson and Tu (2001), Lee and Wong (2003), and Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman (2000); but see also B. Coleman's essay (2009) on race as technology long before the digital or Internet moments. On gender, see Taylor (2006, 93–124), Wajcman (2004), and Balsamo (1996).

19. On the complex relationship between fantasy and "reality" in Freud, see the work of Laplanche and Pontalis (1986).

20. In a useful discussion of haptic visuality, Laura Marks describes how "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch. . . . While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. . . . Haptic visuality involves the body more than is the case with optical visuality" (2000, 162–63).

21. Regarding media methods, see E. G. Coleman's essay (2010) for a review of recent ethnographic forays into newer forms of media. See the work of Ito et al. (2010) for a

much-referenced volume that demonstrates ethnographic research methods for studying new media practitioners.

22. Compare Hannerz (1996) and Marcus (1996).

23. There exist a multiplicity of cultural studies approaches, and doing justice to this heterogeneity is beyond the scope of this introduction. In pointing to this particular approach, our objective is simply to indicate its salience as one of the many genealogies of scholarship that have inspired us.

24. Compare Mercer's (1991, 171) essay on the historical contingency of contexts.

25. See also Schein's (1997) analysis of the polysemy of the image of the white woman's body as it circulates across China.

26. See the work of Modleski (1991) for an eloquent critique of the positivist imperative in social science approaches.

27. See also the work of Ortner (1995), who also foregrounds the embodied nature of the ethnographic enterprise.

WAYWARD EROTICS

Mediating Queer Diasporic Return

My life in the Philippines ended when the plane left Ninoy Aquino (Manila's international airport) and I flew to America. I was okay with my gay life in New York. Then I went back [to the Philippines] for a visit and I became confused. The moment my plane touched Philippine soil—it was like an avalanche of feelings. Suddenly, I was confronted with my old crushes, new sexual opportunities—people thought I was hot because I lived in New York. There were also a lot of good and bad memories, people you don't want to see and people you are desperate to see one more time for . . . you know. [*wink*]

—CARLO (TRANSLATED FROM TAGALOG)

The words of Carlo in the epigraph to this chapter prefigure the arguments, ideas, and voices that follow. Carlo is a gay Filipino man who immigrated to the United States in 1987, and his statement evokes the complexities, nuances, and rhythms of queer diasporic return.[1] While aspects of diasporic queers' stories about homecoming may parallel those of other migrants, they radically diverge due to queers' vexed relationship with home and the complex erotic underpinnings of the act of returning to the homeland. Diasporic return not only involves tearful reunions with family and friends, but visits to memorable places. It could unleash, as Carlo has intimated above, an "avalanche" of encounters, anxieties, desires, acts, and longings that pivot around the erotic. Here, the erotic does not function as a travel signpost leading to a definitive destination, but opens up messy entanglements and engagements with sexual, gendered, familial, national, and transnational affinities.

This chapter emerges out of these complex articulations of home, desire, fantasy, and memory. What follows is an attempt to tease out these complexities by focusing on the meanings around the erotic dimensions of queer diasporic return in the film *Miguel/Michelle*. In other words, I chart the ways the film provides a text and a stage for the contestation of competing meanings around queer identities, and the discrepant forms of travel and erotics in the Philippine diaspora.

The film is about a Filipino male immigrant to the United States, who after gender reassignment surgery comes back to Manila as a woman after a few years. Miguel, who leaves for the United States, comes back as Michelle, ostensibly to receive an award from her alma mater for being an outstanding graduate who made good abroad. However, her return is transformed into a public revelation or "coming out" of her new self and body. After a riotous homecoming at the airport, where her mother faints in disbelief, Michelle confronts her hometown and its people, with their varying reactions and opinions. The high school attempts to rescind her award, and in the ensuing debacle, she begins a tortuous odyssey with family, queer and heterosexual friends, and neighbors. While she is able in large part to win over the townspeople in the end, she decides to go back to the United States.

The film was produced and first screened in Manila in 1998. It was directed by Gil Portes, who was able to distribute the film for viewing in various film festivals (most of which were lesbian and gay focused) in U.S. cities such as Seattle, New York, San Francisco, and Tempe, from 1999 to 2004.[2] It is still available for sale or rent in various video shops in Filipino communities in the United States. The film enjoyed a wider distribution than most films produced in the Philippines and has "traveled" widely.

At the heart of the film and the critical core of this chapter is the idea of diasporic return to the homeland. Scholars such as Robin Cohen (1997) and James Clifford (1992) have suggested that return haunts the past, present, and future of all diasporas. Traditional social science literature on diasporas insists on return as an inevitable and logical outcome of emigration. This romantic notion is based on the primacy and stability of homeland origins. It is also premised on the idea that return is about a completion of the cycle of diasporic travel and, by implication, a fulfillment or filling in of the lack or void that originally precipitated the initial departure.

Such traditional formulations of diaspora are focused on masculinist and heteronormative constructions of travel and home. Traditional renderings of diasporic travel naturalize links between heterosexuality, family life, masculinity, and modernity. In Philippine discourses before the late 1980s, dias-

poric travel was often embodied in the heterosexual male who travels both for adventure and for the survival and well-being of his reproductive family. Life abroad was constructed as being filled with danger and risks. During the height of the mostly male labor migration to the Middle East in the seventies, several popular representations constructed this labor destination as one of sexual peril, including accounts where Filipino men have been raped by their Middle Eastern male employers. Therefore, diasporic return in these discourses was portrayed as an escape or refuge from the horrors of elsewhere and includes the validation and claiming of masculine authenticity and normativity. At the same time, it involved the recognition of the returnee's modernity. The act of traversing political and geographic borders more often than not conferred cosmopolitan modernity on the returnee. However, these formulations or ideas about diaspora and return were unable to capture the nonlinear and messy itineraries that deviate from the ideal norm.

This male-centered view of migration was held to be true until the late eighties, when a major gender shift occurred in Filipino labor migration in response to demands by the global labor market. Filipino women have outnumbered males in the labor flow out of the Philippines for the past fifteen or more years (Parreñas 2001). At the same time, male-inflected and heteronormative conceptions of domesticity and travel still permeate national discourses. While female labor migrants have been hailed as the new heroines by the state, they also have to confront the ambivalence of Philippine society that still upholds patriarchal arrangements of family and reproduction. It is this larger context of social ambivalence, dire economic conditions, and gendered and sexualized conceptions of home and diasporic movement that frame the discussion of the film.

Utilizing multisited fieldwork in New York and Manila to inform an ethnographically based reading of the cinematic text, this chapter has multiple aims. The first aim is methodological, that is, to deconstruct the notion of a "queer audience" and to highlight the multiple modes of reception and interpretation of the film. By deploying the ideas and experiences of two groups of queer interviewees in these two cities, I demonstrate how ethnography provides a method as well as a framework for the study of cinematic reception that includes the intersection of erotic desire, migration, and global culture.[3] The film's dissemination requires a dynamic view of audience reception that hinges on notions of home, embodiment, and mobility. As such, this study reflects not only on the vicissitudes of the film's "life" but also on the methodological rigors of studying the shifting terrains of cultural

production and consumption in the contemporary globalizing world. My aim is not a straightforward comparison of the audience groups in the two cities. I am more concerned about how both groups deploy intersecting and sometimes conflicting discourses around the homeland, the migrant body, and erotics, and how they enable a culturally rich reading of the filmic text. By highlighting these discourses, I complicate the connections between the two groups and the idea of transnational mediation. However, I am not in any way suggesting that one group can stand in for another. My intent is to show both divergences and fluid intersections of ideas rather than lining these groups into parallel and separate, independent entities.

The second and more important aim is to explore deterritorialized erotics in Filipino, queer diasporic return. Using the term "erotics," I follow the ideas of anthropologists Purnima Mankekar (2004) and Louisa Schein (2004), who point to the ways desire is mediated transnationally through film, television, and other media forms. For them, erotics extend beyond "sex acts or desires for sex acts [and are] enmeshed also in fantasy, everyday practice, social relationships and political institutions" (Mankekar and Schein 2004, 358). Furthermore, they argue that the "erotic" sets the stage for the performance of social anxieties and tensions and is "centrally implicated in the construction of hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity" (358). This chapter, then, can be seen in part as a response to the challenge made by Schein "to pluralize eroticisms, analytically distributing them more evenly over the variety of desiring subjects that are players in diasporic contexts rather than situating eroticism primarily in the overprivileged body of the travelling, migrant male" (Schein 1999b, 725).

Diasporic return is constituted by various motivations, temporalities, and modalities. Some scholars have resorted to creating a typology of various modes of diasporic return that include provisional returns, forced returns, or the kind of return that exists primarily in the imagination (Long and Oxfeld 2004).[4] Diasporic return is also a mediated concept shaped and inflected by biographies, histories, and power structures (Long and Oxfeld 2004; Louie 2004). However, Louisa Schein (1999b) astutely suggests that diasporic return, despite all its inflections, is primarily constituted by corporeal and sensory experiences and practices that are embedded in a specific form of erotics. She further suggests that the homeland is a site for "both capital accumulation and for erotic entanglements" (1999b, 699). Therefore, homeland attachments are pivotal in the enunciations of the sexual, the national, and the erotic. In her study of the circulation, production, and reception of Hmong American videos, Schein explores the notion of "homeland

erotics" to signal the intertwining processes of displacement and emplacement in nationalist feelings and sexual longings (1999b, 699). She seeks to "link the complex of desires that saturate the figure of the homeland(s) with the corporeality of eroticism" (1999b, 724).

Following and expanding on Schein's ideas, I examine the figuration of the queer diasporic returnee and how return migration or diasporic return is eroticized and mediated through cinematic and quotidian arenas. The term "wayward erotics" may be used to highlight how "homeland erotics" involve insubordinate or recalcitrant forms of practices, institutions, and meanings that constitute queer diasporic phenomena—forms of erotics that refuse or deflect being anchored to linear, romantic directionality and simplistic filial links to homelands. Wayward erotics are based on the idea of the indeterminacy and instability of the links between body, desire, place, and time. This goes against the view of change as progress deployed in understanding migration and modernity. Instead, wayward erotics suggest the unsettling of gender and sexual identifications and the messy, crisscrossing traffic of erotic acts, bodies, desires, identities, and fantasies. Using multivalent meanings constructed out of lives and experiences in the Filipino queer diaspora, I refigure the idea of diasporic return that is also constituted by queer bodies and desires pivoting around the paradoxical and changing politics of national, sexual, and gender affiliations.

Deconstructing the Filipino "Queer" Audience: Reflections on Method and Context

The cinema scholar Chris Berry (1996) extolled the virtues of film as the vehicle par excellence of globalizing gay cultures. Note that my use of "gay," rather than "queer," particularly in world marketing of such films as *Miguel/Michelle*, is intentional and follows the kind of identification and labeling practices in this specific burgeoning film industry. I use "queer" to cover the range of possible identifications among the men I interviewed. Far from being an innocent conveyor or vehicle of ideas, "gay" cinema in various film festivals and special screenings is suffused with the contradictions and ambivalences of transnational and cross-cultural encounters and linkages.

Film is not a self-contained unit that logically unravels and unleashes its pedagogical apparatus to willing passive pupils. At the same time, I am wary of and dissatisfied with the ubiquitous abstracted notion of "spectatorship" in cultural and film studies that actually privileges a specific authorial voice and cultural background, that of the scholar's. Rather, I suggest that the so-called unsuspecting public and the nameless hordes of disembodied eyes in

dark screening rooms are in fact culturally knowledgeable bodies and lives that actively engage with and interpret the ideas and images on the screen.

The media scholar Ien Ang (1996) argued for "deconstructing the audience," by which she meant paying close and critical attention to the ethnographic specificities and local conditions under which these subjects operate. The group of queer audience members that I interviewed for this project are part of an emergent transnational flow of ideas, images, and bodies in what some scholars have touted as the globalization of queer identities (Adams, Duyvendank, and Krouwel 1998; Altman 1996; Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002; Gopinath 2005; Manalansan 2003; Povinelli and Chauncey 1999). Film festivals, organized tours, festivals, and other events have been considered evidence of this process. However, far from homogenizing or cleanly bifurcating the audiences across the two sites, the differences and similarities are more complex than they would seem at first glance. Easy cultural relativism or universalism cannot adequately or critically encompass the diverse and "messy" ideas presented by these informants.

The two groups of viewers, in Manila and New York, should not be seen as two monolithic groups that are anchored to place. Rather, it is crucial to understand the audiences as grounded in and at the same time exceeding their respective geographical locations. Informants' ideas intersect each other. My ethnographic practice and philosophy around this project highlight the increasing interconnections and traffic between the two sites in order to dislodge the idea of "distinct" communities and promotes the fact that people are increasingly "in transit" both in imagination and fantasy and during actual physical travel. They are involved in intricate and multifaceted contacts with each other through e-mail, financial remittances, visits, and phone calls, and through films, magazines, and other mass-media forms. These men and women do not form a rigid statistical sample; they come close to being nodes spread out in a transnational flow or circuit of ideas, bodies, and desires (Appadurai 1996).

What are the implications of these ideas for my ethnographic analysis? These men's and women's voices provide motivations and counterarguments that need to be read in terms of their cultural and historical specificities as well as in terms of convergences brought about by these transnational flows. These men's and women's narratives, voices, and opinions follow place-based contexts while at the same time exceeding them. In other words, the materiality of place-based contexts should be read with and balance out the intersecting transnational connections between the two spaces and histories.

Each group therefore does not form a single, coherent cluster of a single time and place. In fact more than two-thirds of these informants were interviewed individually and were not part of the audience of a singular theater screening of the film. A third of them watched the video version in their own homes. These informants were chosen primarily for their having watched the film and having identified as gay, bakla, or "trannie," or *operada*, the swardspeak term for transsexual.[5] But this identity requirement is complicated by the fact that most of the informants identified with more than one identity category. The hard and fast requirements for the informants were that that they identified as Filipinos, had some queer identification, and they primarily lived in one of the two cities.

The choice to use the informal ethnographic-interview method with two loosely formed groups was based on the idea that more formal methods may not have yielded the nuanced reading I set out to do. While I depart from the abstracted "spectatorship" studies of the more literarily inclined scholars, I refrain from employing rigid empiricist methods of surveys from the more social scientific ones. Purnima Mankekar, in her study of female television viewers in India (2004), argues that she depended not only on the literal words and voices of her informants but, more crucially, on the silences, gaps, and discursive maneuvers of informants and the vagaries of the ethnographic encounters. I would argue that media-audience study is not a study of objects but, following Mankekar, it is an empathetic engagement with subjects and discourses in flux and in transit.

In talking to informants in both cities, I understood that *Miguel/Michelle* was not in itself a groundbreaking or controversial film. It was by no means the first gay film produced. New York informants told me that this was one of several dozen gay or queer films produced in the Philippines that have been part of various gay and lesbian festivals or were part of special screenings in the city. One New York informant said, "Oh yes, [these films are] a dime a dozen—we see a lot of these Filipino gay films all the time. Some of them are even sold or rented [on DVD or VHS, in regular video stores or gay boutiques catalogues]." Manila informants echoed the same thoughts as the film itself did not make any big splash or controversy. Both groups point to the emergence of a series of films produced by Philippine-based companies that are geared to both a local and an international gay market.

However, the heated and engaged discussions and exchange of ideas I encountered in the two groups of informants were around two major issues—the idea of queer diasporic return and the traffic between sexual and gender categories.

The Returnee's Body and Modernity

Miguel/Michelle revolves around the return of a Filipino immigrant to the U.S. who had left the Philippines for several years. The film begins with the emigration scene at the airport, where Miguel's family and friends tearfully bid him good-bye. Then the scene shifts quickly to a few years later in Miguel's family home, where everyone is preparing to welcome him back. The airport is again the backdrop for Miguel's mother and sister to greet him after he deplanes. But Miguel, unbeknownst to his family, is now Michelle, after undergoing a transsexual operation. After several successful years in America, she comes back, ostensibly to receive her old high school's award for being an outstanding and successful graduate. What transpires after the plane lands in Manila is a quintessential story about the mediation of queer subjectivities in the Third World. The succeeding narrative is propelled by a moving terrain of gender- and sexual-identity categories, politics, and traditions highlighted by moments when "tradition" and "modernity" clash.

One such moment occurs after Michelle's mother faints at the airport and the commotion subsides. Michelle, her mother, and sister drive home together. During the car trip, Michelle's sister asks her if her new body is the most fashionable thing in America. A group of viewers in New York were particularly interested in this scene and especially in the sister's commentary: "What does she [the sister] mean? That America makes us 'abnormal' or fashionable or both?" However, several members of this group countered that when a Filipino returns from abroad, he or she is expected to be wearing the most fashionable items from America, particularly consumer products that the Philippine market lacks. The returnee, therefore, is expected to be a good, modern, consuming citizen. Philippine-based informants expressed the same sentiments. One of them said, "We need to see what living abroad has done to them. Have they succeeded? Or did they fall on their faces?"

In this case, diasporic success is marked and coded by consumption. One New York–based viewer said, "Well, you go home to show them [the people in the Philippines] what being in America and being abroad has done to you. You have to upstage everyone—be *bongga* [fabulous]. Otherwise people over there would think you are struggling here—that you have what they do not have or long to have." They agreed that a returnee, or *balikbayan* (literally "return to country," the term the Philippine government has given to all Filipinos who come back from abroad for vacations, visits, or more permanent stays), is always expected to come back triumphant and to be materially and physically transformed. "Fashionable" and "transformation" in this context

become markers for modernity. The ideas of both fashion and modernity are loosely based on the process of transformation into something "new." During the discussions, informants sometimes used the words *bago*, or new, or *makabago*, or modern, to refer to returnees. Philippine popular discourses therefore construct the balikbayan's body as an index of a desirable modernity typically born out of travel outside the homeland and more specifically to the West.

Manila-based informants were unanimous in saying that returnees need to be "fabulous" or at least show the modern trappings of the bounty of living abroad. Otherwise they are deemed to be failures and oftentimes ridiculed, ostracized, or pitied. Some informants in both sites said that the display of wealth and accomplishments is to incite jealousy among those who stayed behind. A Manila informant said that it had less to do with jealousy and more to do with promoting the idea that living abroad is the only way to become fabulously modern. He said, "I see a balikbayan and I expect something different in him/her. Otherwise, what is the point of living abroad? Why would I even dream of leaving [the Philippines] if I could get all the items I want?" In other words, as most Manila-based informants would attest, the returnee is a figure through which their own longings, desires, and expectations for the diasporic elsewhere can be embodied and visibly inscribed.[6]

Several informants assessed these diasporic transformations not only in terms of what people wear but more importantly in terms of changes of bodily features. Relative fatness or thinness and a kind of "whitening" or skin lightening are often the markers of a returnee's body.[7] As one of them said, "It always seems that living abroad is like getting an extreme makeover."

I asked informants in the two cities why some bodily changes are more acceptable than others. Some of them said that being fat and "whitened" do not disturb "people's sensibilities." Actually, most agreed that skin whitening and being fat are seen as positive and desirable qualities so far as they signal prosperity. Others disagreed and said that "sizing up" what is new about the returnee's body can be a means of bringing a returnee down. A Manila-based informant argued that a fat returnee can be teased for not being modern enough to go to the gym and take care of his or her body.

With these ideas about return, how do informants assess Michelle and her surgically reconfigured body? Michelle's body posed a certain puzzle that exceeded people's expectations, desires, and longings about the returnee's body. One informant humorously said, "Michelle's situation is too extreme, too 'over' [the top]." The "radical" changes in Michelle's body neverthe-

less caused it to become the arena in which her hometown's anxieties, desires, and longings were played out. At first it was clear that Michelle's body caused an extreme rift between herself and her hometown and homeland. Her old high school rescinds the award it is about to bestow on her for being successful abroad. The town, after learning of the new Miguel in Michelle, is soon abuzz with vitriolic gossip. From the people who hang out in the neighborhood store to the puritanical women in Michelle's mother's group, people try to grapple with this new, bizarre, and foreign being. At the heart of this turmoil is the question of whether Michelle's body renders her a modern being or a being out of time and place—a sexual and cultural alien.

But, as many informants argued, the situation is not that simple. Despite being socially ostracized and having acquired an alien or stranger status imposed by her hometown, Michelle attempts to wrest back her rightful place of respect in her hometown. Her abjection is not total and is in fact constituted by other opposing attitudes and engagements, as scenes of sexual encounters and friendly dialogues with queer friends attest. Michelle's is not an extreme case that radically departs from the popular construction of the returnee's body. A form of wayward erotics is at play in Michelle's case and in those of other returnees. Such erotics are constituted by ambiguous and conflicting desires. The conversations among informants reveal that such desires, projections, and expectations do not easily or readily adhere to returnees' bodies. Instead, they become part of an unruly circulation of oftentimes contentious perceptions and opinions about modernity, fantasy, and desire.

While the body of the balikbayan is always read against the ideals of transformation and modernity, Michelle's case can be read as a queer one where anxieties and recalcitrant desires unsettle longings for a cosmopolitan modernity and for valorized corporeal features emblematic of diasporic mobility and travel. Michelle's predicament unleashes an avalanche of intersecting desires that disrupts the easy connections between body and modernity, and between mobility and stasis. In other words, Michelle queers diasporic conventions about modernity, because, in her case, eroticized expectations, longings, acts, and desires do not lend themselves to a facile reading based on legible and stable gendered and sexualized bodies rooted in static temporal and spatial locations.

Several informants from both groups suggested that the movie was really about the struggles of Michelle, her family, friends, and hometown to situate themselves accordingly, not only in terms of Michelle's new body but to an elusive modernity and to a homeland. Was her body just another Ameri-

can modern fad, a natural aberration, or a matter of cultural failure?[8] Some informants framed it in terms of an envious people's disciplining and preventing an overly successful person from abroad from claiming her proper place. One informant said, "They [townspeople] didn't understand her, so . . . the only thing to do was to put her down and make them[selves] look better [than] her despite the fact that they have never been abroad. In some ways, they envy her and some of them know they will never go abroad so they make Michelle a moral lesson or [a negative] example of how crazy things . . . happen to you when you go out of the country."

Other informants asserted that the reactions cannot be summed up simply as one town's scorning of a former inhabitant or an attempt to make a moral example of her case. Informants suggested that Michelle's return unraveled her hometown's anxiety about its own modernity and its place in a globalizing world. By unearthing these smoldering anxieties, these hometown folks reframed the question around locating Michelle's body within specific cultural and temporal logics, making the question one that interrogated their own predicament and their own "proper place" in the world. In other words, the townspeople cannot be characterized as being merely envious of Michelle. Her return to the homeland, as several informants argued, was an opportunity for the townspeople to place themselves on equal footing or as plausible alternatives to Michelle's Western modernity.

For example, a member of the high school committee that meets to vote about rescinding Michelle's award, a supporter of Michelle, counters the insulting innuendoes hurled against her by saying the townspeople cannot but accept Michelle because they are all "modern." With this statement, he was trying to grapple with the idea that America is not the only arbiter or primary space of modernity. He was also suggesting that the Philippines can be a site for the existence of a modernity that does not depend upon diasporic travel and is not rooted in the West.

Michelle's supporters in the film demonstrate what informants in Manila suggested, that even people who stay put and who do not travel may also assert their own modernity, and that modernity is possible without transnational movement. Such maneuvers are attempts to dismantle the teleological narrative of Third World migration as movements from the tradition and premodernity of the homeland to Western modernity. However, these assertions raise a question regarding Michelle's body and her own dilemma about her "proper place." Where is this proper place and what roles do erotics play in understanding this dilemma?

At Home in the Body and the Body at Home: Locating Erotics in the Elsewhere

In Michelle's hometown, the church, as the space of tradition, coexists with queer spaces such as the beauty parlor and the cross-dressing beauty pageant. The beauty parlor in Filipino queer cartography is the paradigmatic space of the bakla, so much so that another slang term for the overt screaming bakla is *parlorista*. In one crucial scene, Michelle visits her gang of parloristas, who welcome her with open arms. In succeeding scenes, Michelle and her friends attempt to situate themselves within corporeal politics and queer erotics.

In one scene, there is great interest among Michelle's gang of bakla-parloristas not only with her bodily transformations but also in the new erotic pleasures that have been enabled by such changes. In comparing herself to Michelle, one of the queer friends laments that the baklas were doomed to anal intercourse, or what they call *kimbash* in swardspeak, in reference to Kim Basinger, who allegedly appeared in a film that involved such an act. In this context, the name of the Hollywood star is utilized in reference to and in amplification of their lack. The West is held in a brief moment as the space for queer authenticity and erotic longings through Michelle's surgically constructed vagina. However, several other situations complicate this initial reading.

A bakla friend takes Michelle aside and asks her about her erotic escapades in America. Michelle admits to having a Caucasian boyfriend and then confides that it was quite painful to have vaginal intercourse. Michelle's revelation goes hand in hand with her successful seduction of a male childhood friend. However, despite this erotic entanglement, which could be initially seen as a triumphant fulfillment of youthful desire, Michelle appeared to be remote and perturbed to many informants. Several informants in both cities remarked how Michelle looked uncomfortable throughout the film. At the same time, some informants saw her in a different light, as one of them said, "She seemed to be so far removed from [the] chaos [happening around her]—you know, like being above the fray. . . . Was she some kind of angel or something?"

The revelation about her physical discomfort and her seemingly placid or remote demeanor may seem to be contradictory at first. Some informants in both cities suggested that Michelle's serene demeanor was a ruse as she was in the middle of this social turbulence. Most informants there-

fore suggested that despite appearances, Michelle really felt unsettled. Several informants thought that she should have been ecstatic in finally bedding down her childhood crush or because the town eventually accepts her. These sexual conquests and eventual reconciliation with the townspeople should have made her demeanor appear more upbeat. However, such was not the case.

Part of the answer to the discomfort is highlighted at the end of the film, right before Michelle's departure to return to the United States, when she makes the pronouncement that she has finally realized and accepted that she is neither a woman, a gay man, or bakla, but a transsexual. This denouement may seem logical at first since her return to the Philippines can be interpreted as a search for completion through a claiming of an authentic self. This scene may seem to play into the standard narrative of diasporic migration as a product of loss, and that return is an act of recovery or fulfillment typically enacted through an epiphany about selfhood. The film's ending seems to suggest that queer diasporic return is a performance of redemption, but I would argue otherwise.

This easy reading is complicated by Michelle's engagements with the world of the Filipino bakla, most of whom were her friends before leaving the Philippines. In her attempt to locate herself in the queer homeland, Michelle attends bakla cross-dressing beauty pageants and hangs out with her bakla friends. It is through the spaces of the beauty pageants and beauty parlors that Michelle struggles to "come home" to a sexual and gender homeland. In this case, Michelle's homecoming was not about settling into a geographic space but an attempt to settle into a notion of a gendered selfhood. This search was hampered by competing identity categories and ideologies alternately defined by the West, Filipino society, and surgical procedures. The traffic and collision of identities—gay, bakla, and transsexual—finally seem to end for Michelle with her seeming rejection of two homelands, the Philippines and bakla identity.

However, Michelle's rejection is more aptly termed a kind of recalcitrance that deflects questions of origins and is therefore marked by ambiguous and seemingly contradictory acts of yearning, disidentification, and eventually uncomfortable refusal. Anne-Marie Fortier rightly warns against simply reading queer diaspora as "emphatic refusals of home(land)" because it would be a "mistake to underestimate enduring queer affiliation to home" (2001, 409, 410). I would argue that Michelle's refusal is suffused with the complicated business of conflicting identities and erotic entanglements. It is

precisely Michelle's physical and cultural discomforts with erotic entanglements, and with the homeland, that lead her to be enmeshed with the messy business of national, gendered, and sexualized bodies that move or stay put.

Adi Kuntsman, in her study of Russian émigré lesbians in Israel, suggests that queers undergo a double homecoming that is fraught with ambiguities and conflicts. I would argue that Michelle's case involves multiple homecomings that are not just about a settling back into the various "homes" but in the simultaneous, fleeting attachments to spaces and identities, and subsequent, oftentimes reluctant abandonments and departures. Fortier formulates home as "a situated event" and the reworking of home as a "site of intersecting lines of movements—one begins towards the past and back into the present and the other contracting the past into future." But this reworking also complicates "home as [the] site of attachment: a site where one attaches herself, even momentarily, by way of grounding who she is or was, in her process of becoming" (Fortier 2001, 412, 415). In Michelle's case, home is constituted by specific moments and encounters of affiliation and disidentification, and by fleeting moments of becoming rather than being. In other words, the search and struggle for a "proper place" and home are unfinished if not continuously deferred.

Many informants suggested that Michelle's physical discomfort and pain mask a deeper cultural, if not psychic, discomfort with her body as a kind of home. Even with her dramatic declaration of being transsexual, informants suggested Michelle may in fact continue to feel some cultural and physical pain or discomfort even after she returns to America. Several informants, including the trannies, suggested that she would encounter more barriers, such as racism, that would further complicate her settling into her "new home." At the same time, the trannie informants were perplexed in Michelle's attempt to "fix" and "anchor" her identity as transsexual when in reality they themselves have found the importance and necessity of having multiple situated identities that are in flux. As one of them eloquently said, "When you are in the middle of trying to survive the daily grind, one identity will not always get you what you need. You need to be creative and always maneuver." It is the process of constantly maneuvering and always being in transit, of always being in the process of "getting to" and not settling into destinations or homelands, that define the diasporic dilemma. Because of these reasons, some of my informants suggested that the film's ending was not a happy one but was more open, slightly optimistic but suffused with pathos.

But where do all these realities leave the bakla? Diasporic return is never

only about the people who literally move but more crucially include those who "stay put." Michelle's encounters with the bakla-parlorista friends were not just encounters with identities but also with subjectivities, bodies, and forms of mobility. According to some informants, the film seems to suggest that transsexuality is the "future" of the bakla. Or to put it another way, the Third World bakla exists as the temporal and corporeal antecedent to Western, modern transsexuality and exhibits a lack that can be filled only by the transformations of modern surgery.

However, such temporal and spatial mappings are complicated by what many informants have noted. Transsexuality is not, as Michelle's predicament unwittingly shows, a fixed and ready-made solution. Informants argued that the erotic possibilities with surgically assigned sexual organs can be as limiting and elusive as they are liberating. More important, informants countered that the bakla should be characterized in this situation as a figure that crosses gender borders more efficiently than Michelle, whom they see as painfully embodying Western queer modernity. Therefore, the bakla, as exemplified in rowdy, witty conversations and in the ensuing beauty contest, exist and survive with, through, and in spite of the onslaught of the West and the burden of tradition. They are able to mediate Hollywood, diasporic, and cosmopolitan glamour and make it their own. Nowhere is this more prominent than in the discursive relocation of Kim Basinger from the filmic elsewhere to their mundane local existence in the Philippines.

Far from being incarcerated in place and time, the film and the parloristas portrayed home as a vexed space fraught with erotic possibilities and limitations, persistent struggles, and constant maneuvers. In the end, it is not the figure of Michelle the "transsexual" who demonstrated heroic resilience, but the modern figure of the bakla who stands at the crossroads of the nation and the global.

New York informants remarked the seeming idealization of America, which is a spectral but not a physical presence in the film. At the same time, several informants noted that instead of a naive yearning for America, they observed a particularly strong pride among the bakla friends in staying put and being immobile. However, their "immobility" is combined with their dexterous "shuttling" between cultural and linguistic spaces. The witty and shrill conversation in the parlor performs the actual traversing of borders when categories are exchanged for one another—bakla for gay or vice versa. Categories collide as in a cultural traffic jam. The conversation demonstrates the ways sexual and gender categories and identities, and, by implication, erotic underpinnings, are products of the situation and the moment—

shifting products of quotidian maneuvers and not definitive anchors for defining selfhood. The semantic maneuvers that the parloristas deploy in conversation are a testament to their own struggles with local conditions as they marvel at and deploy translocal and transnational icons and ideas.

It is fantasy that enables the bakla to be mobile. I use the term "fantasy" less as a psychoanalytic term than as a form of social discourse brought about by the bakla's skill at "moving" through spaces psychic, virtual, and social that enable them to imagine possible worlds. The bakla in the film clearly recognize the erotic possibilities of the fantasy of a surgically constructed vagina. Such erotics are not merely confined to a mournful longing but are tempered by the limits that Michelle intimates.

For the bakla, erotics emerges from the linkages between fantasy and movement. Fantasy and the imaginative movement it engenders are filtered through and embodied in the bakla's language, gestures, and rituals. As such, the forms of erotics attached to these objects and practices are always in transit, always refusing settlement, and always wayward. That is, this form of erotics refuses to be moored to a fixed point or to specific physical or corporeal features. To put it another way, the vagina is both limiting and liberating, so that the bakla, as many informants would argue, are not in perpetual fetishized longing for it.

The bakla refuses allegiance to specific stations or destinations; instead, he figuratively moves on to other objects, bodies, and practices that contain other erotic possibilities. As many informants observed, the bakla characters seem to treat each new scene or turn of event as one of infinite possibilities. The enthusiasm they convey suggests an attitude of "moving on" that takes each situation as an opportunity for more maneuvers. As one informant rightly observed, "They [the bakla characters] are really fast with 'owning' the scene—they practically steal it from Michelle." The bakla, while materially limited, recognizes his own longings for cosmopolitanism and movement by creating his own routes and itineraries to find a sense of home while in transit or, to put it another way, to find a sense of becoming.

Finally, the film reconfigures and recuperates the bakla not only as a reaction against the onslaught of Western gay and transsexual discourses but more importantly to point to the limits of a queer diaspora (Gopinath 2005). Far from being the solution to the bakla's lack, Michelle's acceptance of transsexuality is in fact enabled only in reference to the bakla. In temporal and spatial terms, the bakla exist independently from and located in an insubordinate position to the transsexual.

Informants in both Manila and New York suggested that the film's char-

acters struggled to create an idea of queer diasporic modernity founded on the resilient and mobile figure of the bakla and not the transsexual. This idea disturbs and troubles the idea that the bakla is a marooned figure of static tradition and the transsexual is a product of Western modernity and mobility. Therefore, in both Manila and New York City, there was a reconfiguration and recuperation of the bakla not only as a reaction against the onslaught of Western gay and transgender discourses but also as buffer against the chaos of diaspora. The bakla, through their own efforts in such spaces as the beauty parlor and the beauty pageant, are struggling to create a modernity founded on their own strong, agile, and mobile fantasy world.

Manila Again? Wayward Erotics and the Promise of Queer Diasporic Return

In her essay "Homesick," the Filipino American writer Jessica Hagedorn playfully and poignantly dramatizes home not just as a place one returns to but as a space that is continually remade. She writes, "I leave one place for the other, welcomed and embraced by the family I have left—fathers and brothers and cousins and uncles and aunts. Childhood sweethearts, now with their children. I am unable to stay. I make excuses, adhere to tight schedules, I return only to depart. I am the other, the exile within afflicted with permanent nostalgia for the mud. I return only to depart. Manila, New York, San Francisco, Manila, Honolulu, Detroit, Manila, Guam, Hong Kong, Zamboanga, Manila, New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, Manila again, Manila again, Manila again" (Hagedorn 2002, 180). More important, Hagedorn suggests the nonlinearity of homemaking in relation to diasporic movement and travel. Home is always in the moment and almost always fleeting. If home is a "situated event," then queer diasporic return is not a singular event, but is constituted by multiple events in which home is unraveled and renewed (Fortier 2001, 409).

The airport is an apt metaphor for the ideas of crossings and departures involved in the film's text. The cinematic text begins and ends at the airport. It frames the film in such a way that an image of the elsewhere haunts the borders of the story. The airport is the space that contains the excesses of modernity. It is a "supermodern" space or a "non place" where traditional forms of sociality and community are virtually absent (Auge 1995). Moreover, the airport is the paradigmatic space of the transnational age, as it functions as the material and symbolic springboard for travel and border crossings. The airport is also the pivotal space for propelling the narratives in this chapter. The airport evokes stories of bodies in transit, of perpetual

arrivals, departures, and ongoing journeys. It exists between various destinations but is not in itself a destination. In the film, America is named as a destination, yet it exists as an elsewhere, as it is neither the temporal and spatial endpoint nor the antipodal space to homeland.

Transnational media such as film are not mere information vessels but are also vehicles for the transport and transfer of erotics. The voices and images of people in various spaces and times, from filmic and quotidian realms, bring forth alternative conceptions of diasporic attachments—filial, national, and erotic. Transnational media are the products as well as producers of peoples on the move, and as such they promote desire and fantasy in ways that defy normative routes and paths.

Queer diasporic return is not about final closures, redemptive endings, rosy futures, or ontological completion. Both queer diasporic return and its concomitant wayward erotics are about the recalcitrance of teleology and linear temporalities. As Judith Halberstam (2005, 13) astutely puts it, queer bodies and narratives much like Michelle's produce "queer times and spaces" that challenge "conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility"—and, I would add, modernity. Michelle's story does not retrace the typical itinerary of diasporic migration and return, where the future is held as a definitive and attainable destination. Her tale unsettles this trajectory and points to the limits of a fixed and singular future, holding the promise of elusive futures.

Notes

1. I deploy "gay" and "bakla" to signal self-identifications as well as culturally incomensurable cultural categories. "Bakla" is a Tagalog word that signifies effeminacy, homosexuality, and transvestism. I use "queer" as an overarching category, but I also signify sites, bodies, and lives that depart from the heteronormative.

2. According to informants in the Philippine film industry, Gil Portes is a known, heterosexually identitifed movie director who is famous for making films that were box office hits. He has produced other gay-related films that he has similarly placed in the gay and lesbian international film festival circuit and market. I use "gay" specifically to highlight the ways this international market is always inscribed as gay and not queer.

3. I have conducted fieldwork in the New York City area for more than twelve years. More specifically, my fieldwork for this project was conducted for a total of nine months in 2002 and 2003. Fieldwork in Manila was conducted in 2003, 2004, and 2005, for a total of eight months. The Manila group of interviewees was made up of fifty men, had a mean age of thirty, and included men who participated in the gay scene. The New York

City group included eighty men (including two transsexuals who considered themselves gay men, bakla, and or "tranny"), had an average age of thirty-five, and included men who were all immigrants and were in varying degrees of affiliation with the city's gay scene. Interviews were conducted both individually and in groups, and lasted from thirty minutes to two hours. The focus of the discussions was the film *Miguel/Michelle*. Both groups saw the film before the interview and group discussions. Among the New York group, there were two "transsexuals" who identified as trannies, bakla, and gay at the same time. There were ten men in the Manila group who identified as cross-dressing bakla, while the rest identified as either gay or bakla or both. I use the female pronouns for the "trannies" and the male pronouns for the rest of the interviewees.

4. See also Louie's (2004) study for an ethnographic account of the diasporic return of Chinese American youth.

5. My use of the word "trannie" is to follow my two transsexual postoperative informants, who insisted on using the word because it was less clinical and specific. In addition, these informants were also adamant about being labeled as gay, bakla, and operada at the same time. Swardspeak is the bakla argot or code. See Manalansan's (2003) work for a thick description of this linguistic feature. See the work of Halberstam (1998) and Hale (1998) for debates and issues regarding transgenderism and transsexuality.

6. I thank Dara Goldman for this felicitous phrase.

7. Schein (1999) also reports such epidermal transformations' being assigned to Hmong Americans who visit their ethnic homelands.

8. It is important to note that transsexual surgery is available in Thailand and not just in the global North. In fact, Thailand is now a destination for cheap but reliable gender reassignment surgical procedures. But this geographic reality does not deter the imagined cartography of transsexuality that is based in the West and that I am suggesting here.

FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE

Self-Health (*Ziwo Baojian*) Information in Beijing in the 1990s

One rainy Sunday in Beijing, in 1997, I went to a shopping mall bookstore in search of popular works of health advice. The shops in the complex were crowded. They were always busy on Sundays, but this day the rain had led more people to seek the warmth and stimulation of this seven-story department store with its many boutiques. In the bookstore, there were two cases full of popular health books, a bonanza for me, since I had just begun an ethnographic project exploring the popular space between the institutions of Chinese medicine and the daily life of health-related practices. Planted in front of these cases were two men in their early twenties, both noticeably down-at-the-heels in an urban sort of way. Standing one at each case, and each examining his own copy of the same book, they made room for me grudgingly. As I worked my way down the shelves, sampling books on everything from nutrition therapy to home care of the aged, I could see that the book they were reading was an illustrated guide to sexually transmitted diseases. Though both men were careful not to display the book's cover, and thus its title, to me, the topic was not hard to discern. Page after page of color photographs exhibited horrifying skin conditions afflicting both male and female genitals. I too wanted to look at this book, for scholarly reasons, of course. But they had the only two copies, and in the end I could not outwait them; when I left with my stack of health books, they were still there, fending off all browsers and intently poring over the lurid color plates in their books.

This is one of the few times I have witnessed someone in the act of reading popular health literature. Of course, I wondered why these two men were reading this book in that way. Anthropologists are supposed to be able to ask

people why they do things. When we do, and when people will talk to us, we tend to privilege the answers we get as if they were the authentic voice of the people. But in this situation, had I asked, even had I known these two men and established some form of (anthropologically fabled) rapport with them, what could they have told me about their reading process? With incredible luck, I might have gotten them to admit to an instrumental reading; perhaps they feared infection themselves and wanted to recognize the symptoms to protect themselves. On the other hand, maybe they told themselves that was their motive, when in fact it was some other gratification they sought in those pages. Even the most minimal form of nonfiction reading, thought of as gathering information or remedying ignorance, has its attendant pleasures or frustrations, and few readers, if asked, could or would articulate much about this aspect of reading. One wonders whether any of us know why we read, and keep reading.

In any case, one can hardly doubt that these two young men, with plenty of time to kill while rain poured down outside, had some kind of highly charged interest in the illustrations they were studying. The unsentimental exteriority of the photographs, as they clinically flattened, isolated, collected, and published body parts that are normally inner, folded, private, and continuous with the rest of the person, transgressed the ordinary limitations of vision and experience and carried, no doubt, its own thrill. It is this textual practice of both flattening and multiplying, and the rather unprecedented visibilities it achieves, on which I focus in the discussion that follows. At the same time, I examine a number of methodological problems that plague efforts to understand the popular and the everyday in any scholarly project.[1]

Let me begin, then, by confessing the many false starts and methodological self-doubts that assailed me as I broached the study of modern Chinese self-health literature and its consumption. Like other areas of research on popular culture, this domain cannot be delimited except by arbitrary authorial fiat. This is the classic problem of the village for anthropologists, who need to select and map a site in which they can do field research. In the case of modern Chinese popular culture, the site for fieldwork is emphatically not the village in which anthropology's privileged method of ethnography came into being. The domain of the popular in China is neither remote nor small nor grounded in a community of people who share a local history and mundane conditions of life. The traditional, easy devices by which we frame a manageable project are denied us in the study of popular culture.

One cannot, for example, render the project much simpler by looking at a small sector of the popular culture market. Even though I only collected,

read, and discussed family magazines, popular health education books, and traditional Chinese medical books, it rapidly became clear that every point of view was available in these materials.[2] Magazine tables of contents, for example, discourage one immediately from taking any article too seriously. For every article on dieting there is one warning about the dangers of dieting and extolling the charms of rich food; articles that conflate pleasure with consuming are side by side with articles that argue for a back-to-basics simplicity; every exhortation to cultivate some Chinese essence is matched by plenty of articles on a universal psychology or civilization. So the focus of first resort, which for an anthropologist is usually culture, understood as a system of meanings and values held in common by a group, seems to be ruled out.[3] Ideas and phrasings drawn from apparently Chinese sources are mixed up with advice and insights identified with U.S., European, Japanese, and even Latin American and Native American cultures. There is no neat cultural system here; in fact, hybridity of a very cosmopolitan kind is much more evident. With this mass-market literature, the textually inclined cultural anthropologist who considers a content analysis in search of a specific Chinese culture is immediately frustrated. This is not only because of the tidal wave of global banalities that fills the pages of cheap self-health publications; one is also discouraged by the realization that even the more cultural-nationalist genres of writing draw their rhetoric from a familiar repertoire of worldwide themes.[4]

In China studies, we can of course do content analyses of the fads and fevers that sweep the popular media and periodically dominate consumption practices. But this is frustrating, since the moment we identify most such movements, they have already begun to recede, and our interpretive effort over the meaning of their content becomes outmoded before it can be published. If commentary on the meaning of current events is what we seek to produce, we can never compete with journalists, some of whom have crafted fairly sensitive discussions of popular consciousness.[5] Trying to avoid the merely journalistic in our efforts as true scholars to identify lasting truths, we aim for interpretive depth and explanatory power, hoping to grasp not only the meaning of Disco Fever or Mao Fever but to explore the indigenous cultural processes through which meaning is made. Even where this attempt at depth evades the twin pitfalls of cultural essentialism and universalization, however, it does not completely solve the challenge of the brief temporality, the transitory quality, of fads and fevers. We may, in neofunctionalist manner, posit a "need for making meaning" in our reading of popular fashions, but we have not thereby explained why meaning has to be

made over and over again in so many different ways. In the classic dilemma of the study of culture, we think we can explain stability and conservatism with the relatively ahistorical concept of culture. But once the similarity of forms in the present to those known from the past is understood as a product of repetition or reinvention, we are challenged even more acutely by the problems posed by agency and change.[6] The classic cultural anthropology of meaning, however rewarding it may be in its thick descriptions, is rather vague on questions of agency and famously inadequate for explaining change.[7]

Other ways of limiting the scope of popular-culture investigation are also hard to sustain. For example, one could treat the category of materials I collect, health information, as an epistemological problem, asking what people in Beijing appear to know these days and how this sort of knowledge is formed and structured both by logical imperatives (for example, by asking what objects or conditions operate as unexamined assumptions) and by sociopolitical conditions (for example, by noting agendas that might arise from the monopoly the Women's Union appears to have on magazines for women). But somehow, as one reads the material that fills the pages of magazines and self-health handbooks, it is hard to think of this as knowledge, and this is not just because it is so shallow and obvious. Knowledge, after all, should accumulate; it should add together to give us a more or less coherent representation of the world or, in this case, of the healthy body and the wholesome life.

This classical vision of knowledge does not help us when we turn to popular culture. In magazines, of course, but also in the popularizing works of traditional medicine, any epistemological investigation encounters only a miscellany, an excess, factoids flying off in every direction, implying all manner of lifestyle alterations while requiring none.[8] What we seem to have here is the difference between truth and truism; the former is a high and demanding problem that will never be solved; the latter is "a proposition that states nothing beyond what is implied in any of its terms" (Fowler, Thompson, and Fowler 1995). In other words, the truths we can collect in popular health advice verge on being self-evident, preresolved, commonsense, grandmotherly nuggets. As such, they are not saved, or even remembered, much of the time, and they are not in themselves transformative. Their greatest power is to converge with many other nuggets as part of a short-lived fad, and their longest temporality is as recycled fragments of a thick and heterogeneous stratum of common sense.

A third way of delimiting the domain of popular culture is to openly em-

brace a critical project and then proceed to collect deconstructible texts on which to apply a critique. Of course we have seen a great many such projects in the United States, where critiques of the commodification of women's bodies, the snares and delusions of studio photography, and pandering journalism about the rich and famous are well advanced. These critical projects could, and perhaps should, be exported to reform China along with the images and representations that have occasioned them. But who will be applying the critique? Every writer must answer this question for himself or herself. In my own case, the critic would be a more or less feminist, more or less privileged, more or less American anthropologist who, steeped in poststructuralism, routinely seeks to relativize and denaturalize cultural phenomena. Increasingly, however, we are asked to examine our agenda and consider what is at stake in this kind of work. I am not sure I can embrace a project that seeks to awaken Chinese people from some consumerist ideological dream, mostly because I have no way of being sure that "Chinese people" are asleep in the way this critique tacitly presumes. Moreover, what would be accomplished? Capitalism, with all its seductions and sins, would go right on expanding in China. So, perhaps, would my reputation as a critic. Practically speaking, it is hard to see where the liberation promised by this kind of media critique can come from.

These three approaches to delimiting the field of popular culture—the cultural, the epistemological, and the critical—all have their virtues, and their central concerns cannot be purged from our research. (Nor should they be.) But each is perhaps a little too successful in limiting the field, to the point of severe reductionism, at times. So while we may delineate an object or a domain worthy of contemplating, interesting in itself, even as we do so, the endless stratagems and devices of social life go right on working through media ranging from television to calendar art and rumor. In the domain of the popular, counterevidence for our every argument emerges even before we have fully realized what it is we wish to argue.

Consequently, in the remainder of this chapter, I explore how the popular self-health media are used, and I comment on some of the daily practices in which they have an appeal. Though practice is not really separable from language use and the powers of discourse, I devote little attention to cultural or epistemological content analysis, while at the same time avoiding criticism of any specific contents or styles. Graphic images and textual material are here considered together. This is partly because few of the more accessible magazines and advice books in China rely much on visual material, but more important because I will be exploring some features of nonfiction represen-

tation that are shared by both technological forms. The attempt here is to think through some of the broad characteristics of the self-health explosion as a social genre, considering its modes of informing rather than its particular information.

Let us go back to that warm, dry, well-lit, upscale family bookstore and its two scruffy patrons studying pictures of private parts in a venereology and dermatology textbook. I pointed out that the book each of these men had propped against the display cases both collected many cases of bizarre and unusual conditions and flattened their symptoms into an unusually visible format, offering disease to the gaze in a manner quite unlike the way it would be experienced in any ordinary nonclinical life.[9] The very fact that there were two books on the shelf that could be studied in tandem may be a minimal defining feature of popular genres. Mechanical reproduction had disseminated these privileged, private phenomena outward into the public, taking images both from the lives of particular sufferers and from the clinics in which experts collected and studied a series of such privacies. Actual rashes, boils, and swellings had become pictorial information aimed, by definition, at an indefinite number of nonexpert consumers.[10]

This book was nominally produced for medical education, a process that makes experts from nonexperts. This reminds us that there are two implicit trajectories traced between the "real world" and the pages of popular health materials. The first trajectory, we are told, leads from actual phenomena to the represented information about it. Medical disorders, psychological processes, or biographical events, for example, present themselves in life and make their way into print and visual media re-presented as two-dimensional images. But particularly in nonfiction popular media, this representationalism has a necessary corollary, which is that information presented on mechanically reproduced pages takes its significance from the fact that it can lead back to some more real and particular domain. Medical students examining the pictures in this text may hope to be better prepared to treat individual cases of skin diseases connected to one (embarrassed, confused, demanding, careless, etc.) patient at a time, "presenting symptoms" in an outpatient clinic; our two bookstore browsers may imagine other settings in which they might encounter these disease symptoms or come into contact with another person's genitals, diseased or healthy. In any case, the point of this collection of real things opened out to the gaze of anybody and everybody is the forging of a link to the real, practical life of the reader. Ideas and images move from one life to another (or from many to many) via the printed page or the broadcast signal. The lives that are targeted, those of

media consumers, are presumed to become better informed through this consumption process. There is, in other words, a true in-formation process going on, one in which an increased awareness of the banal characteristics of many others can provide guidance for the self.

What often goes unnoticed in this standard ideology of information media is the violence of representation (Tagg 1993). A picture or a realistic description purports to deliver the phenomenon, delineating all its pertinent characteristics so that its lessons may be seamlessly applied to the phenomenal world of the reader or viewer. In this respect, my embarrassing example continues to serve as a useful illustration. In these pictures of genitalia, though the folds may be unfolded and obscuring structures held aside in order to reveal the affected tissues clearly to the reader's gaze, there are dimensions of these skin disorders that cannot be represented: pain, inconvenience, fear, embarrassment, moralism, secrecy, and so forth. Of course, the reader imagines these things. But as any person who has suffered from disease knows, imagining an affliction is not the same as actually having it.

Much of the existing critique of the manipulativeness of popular representations seems to presume that consumers are both fooled and constituted by them. I do not think, however, that readers are entirely unaware of the reductionism of the informing image. The very casualness with which people in the United States read magazines, as opposed, for example, to the Bible or an encyclopedia, suggests that they are not turning to these pulpy pages for Absolute Truth. If images had the power to distort reality in the way we critics suggest they do, one wonders why there have to be so many of them, endlessly new versions in multiple serial publications that constantly repeat the obvious as if it were news. Apparently it is hard and endless work to constitute a modern bourgeois reality from mass-media representations. Perhaps the style of information one finds in popular publications in China is more authoritative than magazines and self-help books in North America; but the speed with which these items flow through cohorts of friends and acquaintances in Beijing and the relative casualness with which people mix tidbits of information about health from print media with their own experiences and family lore suggest that there are more commonalities than differences with U.S. experience.

So I am turned from the critical insight that popular information reduces and distorts reality to the ethnographic observation that people consume these trivial representations with a certain implicit understanding of their limitations. Chances are that the venereology and dermatology textbook and its color plates left our two young men as ignorant (or knowing) and curious

(or bored) as they were before they studied the book. But it is also likely that the process of reading the book was rewarding in itself. Perhaps the act of applying information to life, comparing collected facts about genitalia and disease to one's own embodied life and carnal experience, is its own reward. The seductions of reading about the life of the body are well known. Medical students report self-diagnosing imaginary illnesses throughout their first few years of study, and advertising has a long history of generating problems that can only be solved by the purchase of a commodity (body odor, smelly feet, and bad breath, for example). As we read, we put our own body into the state described by the text, and we consider adopting or rejecting the intervention the text proposes. If this practice of learning is its own reward, then in the act of reading, people show us that they somehow know this. Reading itself is a pleasurable form of consumption, and perhaps little longer-term reward is expected from nonfiction popular media.

Lurking in this observation is the classic problem of false consciousness. It is easy for us as scholars to see the clinical representations of the venereology textbook as reifying or dehumanizing or manipulative, and we have built much of our critical agenda on elaborating such observations. But what are the implications for our practice if we realize that it might be just as easy for "ordinary people" to perceive the processes through which media manipulate them (and us)? Implicit in the ways people use popular publications—casually, endlessly, forgetfully, and sometimes addictively—is a certain multiple consciousness in which problems of truth and falsehood recede into unimportance. To take a recent example from the United States, perhaps people knew that O.J. Simpson's bloody glove was the wrong size and that this knowledge was of only limited value; perhaps they watched the long trial and the associated coverage not to learn the truth from TV but to enjoy the process of constructing their own stories from the miscellaneous materials provided by the trial coverage. This is not so much error, or even epistemic murk (Taussig 1987, 93–135), as it is a more or less enthusiastic engagement and collaboration in the activity of making (true or false, multiple or singular) consciousness.

Pop Psychology, Traveling Norms

The notion of consciousness invites, then, a turn from external but normally hidden bodily tissues to the folds and depths of the mind. As Chinese self-health literature makes very clear, psychology is a favorite arena of popular consumption. *Xinlixue* (psychology, or the study of the patterns of the heart-mind) is a fad that began to gain prominence in the mid-1980s and

only seems to have expanded since then.[11] It is incredibly well suited to the practices of consuming popular media. In the very similar writing we know as popular psychology in the United States, there hardly seems to be a moment between psychological instruction and becoming. We are told, for example, that men are more visual and women more tactile, that men act and women respond, that men externalize and women internalize, and that men avoid commitment and women seek it. Reading this, how can we disagree? We nod and sigh and say, "How true!" We may regret that human nature is this way, but we do not stop to interrogate the categories on which such observations are based. We seldom note psychology's fixation and reification of conceptual divides between kinds of people—"men" and "women," "parents" and "children." We do not usually wonder if these observations are about behavior or feelings, nor do we ask where the experts draw the line between a behavior and a feeling. We may challenge the asymmetry and conventionality of the relations between entities in psychology, but the entities themselves ("men," "women," "children," "society," "libido," "identity," and all manner of "needs") take on reality in our own hearts and minds almost at the moment we are told of them.

Is this what is happening in China's psychology fever? I do not know, but I confess that I find Chinese psychobabble especially shocking. As a cultural anthropologist, I have been more committed than I always like to admit to the cultural specificity of "Chinese" subjectivities. Bolstered by the difference of Chinese languages and steeped in a traditional medical literature that places a premodern archive near the forefront of reading habits, my project has refused to conflate Chinese experience with a universal, natural human experience. But this is exactly what the popular discourses of psychology do. Beginning many articles with those seductive words, "Foreign experts report that," the mental self-health literature unceremoniously lumps Chinese women with all women, Chinese teenagers with all teenagers. Then it confidently expounds on the psychic characteristics and "needs" of people in this global category, seldom failing to conclude with advice about how "you" can adapt to and modify the unavoidable tendencies of your (universal) kind.[12] This kind of psychological lumping is not only problematic in an anthropological or "other-cultural" context, of course; it elides important differences in North America, too. But given that it seems to me particularly easy to imagine or remember prepsychological ways of existing in China, it is also particularly easy to be disturbed by the popular-cultural processes through which subjectivity is being gently but rapidly transformed. Psychology minutely carves the personal into globally recognizable categories, objects, and

forms, making not just any individual but an individual who can consume responsibly, exercise political "rights," sign contracts, and demand that his or her personal needs be met by "significant others." Perhaps I would worry less about the appearance of this bourgeois subject in China if there were any evidence that modern individuality led more reliably to personal happiness. But I suspect there is more pleasure in attempting the transformation to modernity than in actually living the life of the modern subject.

Of course, there is still hope. We do not really know, and perhaps cannot know, what the actual efficacy of psychological discourses is for contemporary Chinese readers. It would be premature for me to generalize about the modern selves that might emerge from this process or speculate on how psychological self-health information is read. But the universalizing structure of the discourse is almost as interesting as its content and its reception. Like the documentary photographs discussed above, psychological reports flatten the intimate and expose it to multiple gazes and imaginations. Often citing the survey method of data collection, this kind of information both individualizes and generalizes experience by way of the useful fiction of the abstract individual (Foucault 1977, 184–94; Lukes 1973). There is a marked horizontal quality to what one learns from psychology. I am reminded of a psychologist I met once who, much to my alarm, wore a button announcing, "I'm a lot like you." The popular mental health literature in Chinese makes the same disturbing announcement to its readers. Adopting a journalistic appeal to the everyday reality of readers through carefully crafted case histories and realistic details, at the same time the psychological discourse links these mundane conditions to broad universals. Young wives in Chengdu or Guangzhou or Beijing are presumed to be just as worried about keeping the romance in their marriage as people of their age and gender in New York or Manchester. Men "don't cry" in China for the same reasons they don't cry in Atlanta or Kolkata. A lack of self-confidence is presented as crippling in the Chinese business world just as it is considered to be a handicap on Wall Street.

One would think that a truly psychological discourse would seek depth of insight into specific personal states.[13] But this xinlixue proceeds (like North American psychology) by first abstracting the *xin* (heart-mind) from all social, historical, and personal contingency and then, aided by the powerful generalizing tools of the statistical survey, attributing to it self-contained inner patterns that can be studied (*xue*).[14] The resulting human nature is then reported to the general reader and appropriated by that reader into her or his own life in (undoubtedly) a variety of ways.

We could denounce the superficiality and the illegitimate generalization of this media practice for a long time, and there is a certain amount of critical literature on the fallacies of psychology to assist us in doing so (Henriques et al. 1984; Hirst and Woolley 1982, 93–210). But I think there is something important going on here that should also be sympathetically appreciated. Implicit in the universalizing and the naturalizing rhetoric of psychology (in both English and Chinese) is the ruling concept of the norm. The readerly appropriation presumed by this literature is structured around the question, "Am I normal?" Some readers may most enjoy asserting their deviations from the natural norm, while others may take comfort in being nothing but entirely normal. We should never underestimate the pleasures of conformity, despite the fact that we seldom discuss them explicitly. But all who engage with the vast flow of psychological information to which modern Chinese readers are now subjected are given some sense of where the global mainstream lies. No single article or book summarizes or captures the essence of psychological normality, but a multiplicity of facts and a plurality of suggestions serve as navigational aids for readers who steer their personal lives with, against, or along the edge of the global human mainstream.

Medical Popularizing

But is there a global human mainstream? Or is this an illusion painted in American colors and propagated by promoters of certain models of modernization and development? My long-standing engagement with traditional Chinese medicine has been an effort to show that we can only see the actual multiplicities of today's world if we adopt a point of view from the margins of those areas of knowledge and practice that the world's elite takes to be at the center (Farquhar 1991, 1995a, 1995b, 1999). But when we turn to traditional-medicine information in consumer-oriented publications, some of the same practices of flattening, displaying, multiplying, and collecting are evident.

Take herbal medicine, for example. Within the professional confines of Chinese medical practice, there is a highly technical art of administering herbal medicines in customized prescriptions (*fangjixue*), and much of the insider debate in the field centers on the logic, aesthetics, and clinical uses of these complicated combinations of herbs. Moreover, few of the disorders managed by herbal formulas are categories of illness that are mentioned in everyday use anymore. The expert art of discerning a complex and particular pattern of bodily disorder and then prescribing an herbal decoction to treat it (*bianzheng lunzhi*) specifies and compares phenomena in a practice that

at first appears difficult to popularize.[15] The most respected Chinese medical experts base their analyses of illnesses on a long-standing engagement with a large medical archive and considerable accumulated clinical experience. Especially if one attends to the specialist discourses of the field, which valorize embodied knowledge and sensitive face-to-face management of infinitely diverse phenomena, traditional medicine appears to mount a strong resistance to capitalist commodification.

But doctors know that the general public consumes individual herbs or efficacious foods for many common illnesses; people also buy lots of herbal patent medicines, or *chengyao*, which are often cheaper and more convenient to use than a classic customized prescription that requires a sustained engagement with a Chinese medicine specialist. Especially as health services have become privatized, people in many walks of life have developed a newly activist approach to personal health care. Once they would have relied on their work unit or village health center for all primary care; indeed, in the mid-1980s I found that villagers in Shandong, served by a minimal but responsible collective health center, kept no medications at home. It was easier then, if you were ill or needed a regular dosing, to drop by the health station and pick up a couple of aspirin or a cold remedy or to receive your daily shot of chemotherapy. Now, with services more expensive and advertising for medications vastly increased, many of these villagers consume over-the-counter medicines according to their own evaluations of what they need. In nearby towns and cities, urbanites have also found the expanding marketing of over-the-counter medications, both Western and Chinese-style, consistent with their recent sense that quality professional health care is hard to find and expensive.[16]

Acknowledging these popular habits, the traditional-medicine establishment speaks to health consumers in various mass-market publications. A common professional response is to warn against the overuse of some herbs or foods ("Swallow's Nest Is Not a High-Class Moistening Tonifying Product") or to focus articles on the everyday management of commonly recognized illnesses using foods and chengyao ("A Prescription for Headache Sufferers"; "Kids with Night Sweats"; "Does Hysterectomy Influence Sex Life?").[17] In keeping with the ruling "nurturing life" (*yangsheng*) ideology of modern (and arguably ancient) Chinese medicine, the usual moral tenor in such writings is to advocate a life that is well regulated as a whole. But the units in which this information is offered are the easily recognized fragments from which real, everyday lives are (haphazardly) made up. This is true even of self-health monographs, which have detailed tables of contents with help-

fully accessible categories of suffering or therapy so readers need not waste their time with the general ideas in the preface or opening chapter.[18]

The mass media, or lay (*waihang*), life of Chinese medicine thus allows us to perceive once again the logic of popular information. There is a movement from one life to another, from one headache sufferer or child with night sweats to another, or from many to many, via the printed page or broadcast image. The authoritative doctor or institution also mediates, of course; but since any frequent reader of self-health advice surely realizes that experts do not agree with one another, their authority, though necessary to the genre, is somewhat weakened as their advice accumulates. From the point of view of the academic centers of Chinese medicine, then, there is a paradoxical transformation of the profession taking place. Expert knowledge and skill are removed from authoritative practitioners, turned into bits of information, framed in the obligatory moralizing tone, and pushed out into the public domain, where people with who-knows-what deep-seated illness patterns are free to scratch away at the surface of their problems with products they can buy from storekeepers in their local market street. I have not detected much outrage in the Chinese medical community about the popularization of information and drugs; this is, after all, a long-standing aspect of medical marketing in China, and patients have never treated traditional practitioners as gatekeepers to health care the way they do with "personal physicians" in the United States. But there is also no doubt in any expert's mind that popular self-health information is not "really" medicine; rather it is "popular" (*liuxing*, flowing-going), bits of consumable flotsam and jetsam carved out, flattened, collected, indexed, and displayed in the mass media.

Though few are shocked or surprised by popularization, internal critics in the field of traditional Chinese medicine do deplore some of the deeper shifts toward commodification in the context of a newly market-driven medical economy. Patients, they say, should not be the same as customers, and profit-seeking doctors who develop large patient loads can only do so by lowering their standards of medical practice. Even doctors in state-run work units (not to mention the many others who have gone private completely) are now tempted to compete for patients by advertising "secret formulas" and "magical techniques" (Farquhar 1996). It appears harder and harder to find a doctor who adheres rigorously to the once-standard bianzheng lunzhi practice.

This situation offers an interesting model for understanding developments in the popular domain in the 1990s. In the mid-twentieth century, and then more thoroughly in the 1980s, Chinese medical people assembled an extraordinarily rich and beautifully theorized traditional archive cover-

ing more than two thousand years of writing on illness and therapy. At the same time, they built institutions and clinical practices that were flexible, diverse, and yet productive of distinct professional identities and clearly focused technical debates. If any field could resist the fragmenting and flattening pressures of consumer capitalism, it should be this one. (I have, of course, made this resistance the center of my work in the past, and there will be good topics for research on "pockets of difference" in Chinese medicine for years to come.) But the corrosions of the marketplace are very strong; it is difficult to sell a long-term clinical relationship that incorporates an inconvenient technology (nasty-tasting, time-consuming herbal formulas, and acupuncture treatments that sometimes hurt and take at least half an hour) and sometimes unwelcome advice. Doctors who can meet consumer desires are best able to make a living today.

But bodies do not always cooperate with economic transformations. People who are chronically ill still crowd the clinics in which some variety of standard Chinese medicine is practiced. Many of these patients have tried, and continue to try, all manner of readily available chengyao and baojian techniques. But they are also often persuaded that only the continuous, demanding intervention of an "old Chinese doctor" (*laozhongyi*) will reach the root of their malady.

Is it possible that the rise of popular commodification produces its own other? The recent history of Chinese medicine hints that the field of the popular itself might generate new forms of elite expertise, new forms of nonpopular esotericism. In the world of Chinese medicine, for example, while hospital practice grows more and more hybrid (incorporating many biomedical technologies, drugs, and procedures) and commercialization of patent medicines becomes a larger and more visible industry, there are also a number of purist, traditional clinics opening. In such private or semiprivate clinics, senior doctors practice diagnostic and therapeutic regimens they take to be thoroughly classical, demanding of their patients an extended commitment to an often uncomfortable regimen. At the same time, these clinics write advertising copy that emphasizes the esoteric character of their practitioners' skills and the commitments to tradition of the clinic group. Individual doctors decry the improper techniques and misunderstood technical concepts used by their counterparts in the popular marketplace. The fluid and ever-shifting boundary between the popular and its esoteric others should engage some of our attention, especially since much of the daily activity and strongest views of elite experts could be seen as devoted to maintaining this boundary with the clearest possible distinctness.

In conclusion I briefly place these quite unsurprising observations about the practice of the popular in the context of three broader developments: the emergence, or crafting, of private selves in modern China; the globalization of culture; and the stubborn refusal of history to be canceled.

The *Ziwo* (Self) in Ziwo Baojian

In Beijing and Shandong I frequently ask people why they perform some of their daily or weekly routines. Whether the practice in question is fan-dancing, swimming in a frozen lake, eating garlic, or taking a walk after dinner, the answer is always "it's good for health." The very self-evidence of this response has long mystified me. This failure to understand is undoubtedly a product of my position as a middle-class American. Here, people who do a lot of things "for health" are known as health nuts. Though their number is legion, their practice is still marked as a sort of obsession, a way they have chosen to modify or even distort our natural laziness in the service of a higher goal. The fan-dancers and garlic eaters I talk to in China do not treat health itself as a deliberate project, however; rather, it is taken to be the obvious goal of an absolutely normal, everyday life. So to claim that swimming in a frozen lake in January is good for the health is to place a rather bizarre practice squarely in the taken-for-granted mainstream. The swimming might be a concerted project, but health itself is not.

An even more interesting aspect of these wholesome avocations is their personal character. Though a lot of exercise and nutritional regimens involve groups, the payoff in health tends (nowadays) to be seen as entirely personal. Once upon a time the people's health was a national responsibility and part of each citizen's patriotic duty. In the 1990s the term "baojian" has moved away from barefoot doctors, public health, class struggle, and collective projects. Reading about health is clearly about self-cultivation, no matter how disorganized people may be about taking good advice. Self-health information is packaged for maximum ease of consumption. These genres name problems clearly (sexually transmitted diseases, loveless marriages, headaches) so readers can identify in ways that are consistent with their own experience, and they offer ready-to-use techniques and commodities (from antibiotics to massage and lingerie) for easy appropriation by individuals.

This self-building through cultural and consumer appropriation is a very uneven process, however. There is a certain shift taking place as everyday life goes commercial and as the institutional entities of socialist China are privatized. People were once defined by their role in an organization and seemed to care about being personally visible or legible only to those with

whom they worked and lived. This kind of visibility did not require fashionable clothes or up-to-date language. Now one can see a great deal of experimentation with a different kind of visibility. The shift in question is between practices in which people use advertising to locate the products they desire and practices through which people attach products to themselves as a way of advertising their personal characteristics. Conspicuous consumption is visible everywhere, but it is also subject to a practical critique in the habits and attitudes of many who find this kind of consumerism repellent. These same critics of consumer showmanship may, however, be cultivating themselves in other (less visible but highly palpable) ways, swallowing tonics and pills, doing qigong in the park, or studying a dog-eared copy of the *Book of Changes*.

Beyond Cultural Imperialism?

These days it seems that the only people who are really distressed by the fact that there is no longer any spot in Beijing from which a McDonald's is not visible are foreigners. Chinese parents, like U.S. parents, are often quick to comment on the bad food sold by McDonald's, but Beijing's children and young people have taken to this emblem of the global with enthusiasm. One can, on a moment's reflection, understand some of the charms of McDonald's "culture": like other popular phenomena, it provides individualized and egalitarian service, the product is standard and widely thought of as hygienic, and the setting is fairly anonymous, all of which provides a sort of relief from neighborhood restaurants in the same price range (Yan 1997).

Obviously this equalizing, standardizing, and individualizing function is shared by the self-health literature I have considered here. Magazines in particular seem to offer a broad and diverse surface of global culture (the most up-to-date, the most glamorous, the most intimate) from which readers can select, unobserved, those fragments they find most usable and affordable. It is interesting to note that little distinction is made between Chinese and American (or Japanese) consumables. As everyone knows, postcoloniality and cultural imperialism are not often identified as problems in the popular media. Nationalist and culturalist topics are present, of course, but they are placed alongside topics taken from many other parts of the world. In the unsupervised act of appropriation, one fragment seems much like another. Modern Chinese sexual practice is, for example, colonized both by Masters and Johnson and by the traditional "Taoist" erotic arts. What is the difference between these bodies of knowledge? On what common (and possibly new) ground do they build their appeal? Is an ancient Chinese erotics

better-suited to Chinese people, as some consumers of antiquarian books seem to think? Is the biology of sex universal, or are there, as Margaret Lock has argued, "local biologies" (1993)? Research might answer these questions in interesting ways, but it cannot address them at all without taking seriously the global capitalist field that has recently become urban China's most noticeable environment.

It is, of course, the global field in which cultural imperialism becomes an issue. Unfortunately, our sense of scandal as we watch the world (apparently) going American is too tangled up in a continuing naturalization of nations and cultures. It is not uncommon to insist on a Chinese essence that distinguishes this nation and its people from all others, nor is it unusual to denounce the latest fashions in ideas or products as too thoroughly "American." But given that many ordinary people do not seem to care about the national identity of their modernity, this paired romanticism and denunciation begins to appear facile. We have to ask ourselves, what is the other of the global? Can it be empirically found? Are there really resistant centers of difference that are violated by commodity flows and ideological translations? The answers to these questions are not obvious, since it can easily be demonstrated that the sense of the local these days often arises in reaction to global processes. Put more powerfully, the local itself is a process, an array of localization practices that continually produce "neighborhoods" (the language is Arjun Appadurai's) from very diverse and often dispersed resources (Appadurai 1996, 178–99; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a). "Traditional" *ars erotica* or medicine or music, "Confucian" ethics, and local-culture studies have all had their feverish careers as Chinese essences in the reform period. The struggle against foreign incursions in these arenas of national or regional expertise has, in a sense, been going on from the very first moment at which the arena was discerned. Moreover, we should perhaps admit that our sense that something fine is being violated has a lot to do with our position as intellectuals whose careers have been advanced by our ability to distinguish the fine from the vulgar, the noble from the base. Perhaps we are too committed to our traditional task of praising that which appears essential, lasting, and deep while dismissing the transitory and superficial.

Let me be clear. I do think that transnational cultural flows violate something. I do not find the conspicuous consumption of the 1990s in Beijing very attractive, nor do I wish to see the vocabulary of pop psychology colonize conversation in Chinese. It is comparatively easy to admit the contingency of one's own tastes, but such an admission goes only part of the way toward a more satisfactory critique of cultural imperialism. In other words, our dis-

comfort with the spread of bourgeois culture and grief for lost traditions must be grounded in something larger and perhaps less comforting than the class-inflected preferences of cosmopolitan intellectuals like ourselves. So when I try to answer the question, what is the other of the global, all the while keeping an eye on my joint interest in Chinese medicine and the popular self-health literature, only history presents any answers.

History: From *Tongzhi* to *Zazhi*

China's postsocialist modernity seems to have turned away from the totalizing idealism of a collective "common will" (*tongzhi*, comrade) to make considerable public space for the "various wills" found in the world of magazines (*zazhi*, literally "miscellaneous aspirations or marks"). This apparent devolution has not gone unnoticed in either criticism or everyday talk. In the fall of 1997, there was no shortage of people in Beijing who were anxious to explain to me why the bad old days of the Cultural Revolution were, at least morally, superior to the present.

Some intellectuals have recently echoed this refrain, as well.[19] In keeping with my comments above, we could understand the historical seriousness of intellectuals as merely a way of building cultural capital, setting apart a stratum of society for those elite thinkers who are above the vulgarities of the mass media. But the fact that ordinary people in many walks of life are just as disturbed by the speed and thoughtlessness with which Chinese people seem to be turning away from the collective, away from responsibility for national life and for each other, argues for the generality of a contemporary unease. Perhaps nostalgia for the values and collective demands of socialism, along with outrage at the "selfishness" and "greed" of contemporary urbanites, is just another fever that periodically sweeps Beijing. Maybe it is, like other fads that sweep the capital, state fostered (J. Wang 2005). But there is no doubt that people have invested considerable feeling in this form of critique.

This nostalgia is more than just a trendy idea. It impresses me as being rooted in habits of thought and patterns of practical life that were substantially formed under the sway of Maoist socialism. The habits and patterns of life inculcated through practice and imposed by the built environment have, as Pierre Bourdieu has so extensively argued, a certain conservatism (1990, 52–65). They may be mostly inarticulate expectations about what is or should be routine and what is or should be the goal of life, and they certainly evolve as conditions change. But there is a genuine resistance at the level of habit. Popular self-health literature may promote the cultivation of private (or even selfish) selves, and it may propagate "foreign" products and facts

without a second thought, but it cannot entirely erase (yet) the values, commitments, and expectations of readers who learned to be Chinese before the 1980s. In other words, a lot of people still have a historical consciousness that can tell the difference between then and now. They may feel lucky to be able to devote their time and energy to modern self-cultivation, or they may deplore the unthinking selfishness of their neighbors and even their children. They may be rudderless and anxious in a sea of commodities, or they may experience heightened gratification as they buy things they never could have dreamed of buying in the past. Even if modern Beijingers cannot tell the difference between an emergent Chinese modernity and a U.S. or global modernity, they know that the socialist world in which they grew up is no longer with us.

This inarticulate but certain knowledge provides the provisional answer to the question, what is the other of the global? For the time being, in Beijing and much of the rest of developed China, it is neither local cultural essences nor some kind of atemporal national identity; it is a people with a shared past. People in China may remember their collective past's being violent and catastrophic, or they may recall its being more unitary and more comradely than the booming, buzzing atomism of the present. They may even remember it as thoroughly totalitarian (though I have the impression that few in China do remember the Maoist period in this way). But people's conscious memories of history are less important than the difference that has been worked in them by history. When we look at the consumption of popular cultural forms from the point of view of the historically constituted consumer, we can see that while the commodity (or the fact or the image) on offer may be identical in China and the United States, its mode of appropriation can hardly have exactly the same character or significance in these two places.

Since I have returned to the specificity of the reader-consumer here, let us reconsider the scene with which I began, that of two young men reading the same book on sexually transmitted diseases in a family bookstore. They were not very old and thus not likely to be actively nostalgic for (or "wounded" by) Maoist culture.[20] They were not very rich and therefore not among those who are currently most enjoying the consumer boom in Beijing. They were not very attractive, and chances are they would never in life encounter the private parts of many different people. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that most of the information they were collecting had very little pertinence to their past or future lives.

Why were they not reading adventure comics or illustrated sports maga-

zines or television fanzines? Of course, I do not know, but I suspect the fascination of those textbook pages had something to do with the multilayered transgressions they performed. It was not only norms of modesty, of visibility and invisibility, that were being violated. The large number of the plates, combined with the dramatically gruesome pathologies they documented one by one, suggests a certain minor but definite transformation that could be perpetrated on the reader: once informed by these representations, the reader will never again look around and see only hosts of normal people. Anyone, no matter how "typical" in appearance, might harbor some secret malady. Abnormality is real but not necessarily visible, except in these peculiar publications.[21]

I wonder, then, whether the flattened collections of data and the clinically cataloged deviations presented in magazines and other mass media do not have a certain appeal as diversity itself. People may read the ziwo baojian literature—stories on everything from lesbianism to liver disease, plastic surgery to paranoia—partly to improve their own lives but also to assure themselves of what they are not and where they will not go. Scattered over the surfaces of the postsocialist media are facts, images, and commodities that can serve as orientational aids to an unbounded and unmappable terrain. This space of self-building, consumption, nostalgia, hope, and contingent visibilities may not best be thought of as either global or local, either Chinese or universal, either private or public. It is perhaps all of these, with every reader at every moment assembling versions of self and other, here and there, from the most miscellaneous materials. All this multiplicity may be only seemingly diverse, a surface variation atop a monotonously imagined modernity. But for the time being, I think this seeming is important to people for whom the monologue of Maoist discourse is gone but not entirely forgotten.

Notes

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1. I believe these methodological problems are relevant to many forms of research in cultural anthropology and cultural studies. They are especially acute for projects that attempt to describe subjectivity and its modes of production, whether such projects target cultural others or contemporary North Americans. In order to avoid implying that epistemological doubt only applies to ethnographic or historical research with subjects who are far removed from the life of the investigator, I have adopted a frequent use of the first-person plural pronouns "we" and "our." This usage, combined with a more than usually conversational style, is intended to keep the community of reference an

open question—sometimes "we" are groups of scholars interested in the topic of popular culture, sometimes we are embodied human beings, and sometimes we are North Americans who share a historically conditioned kind of common sense. Such a usage can presume too much and should be read critically. Here I wish to presume that there will be a critical reading, thereby proposing that many possible groupings (but not the classical Orientalist groups of East and West) can be salient in research.

2. Most of the observations in this article are drawn from field research conducted part time in Beijing in the autumn of 1997. I have continued to do research on the health-related mass media in urban China, but this chapter does not reflect the results of that research, or the evolution of my thinking on the subject. In a few cases, though, I have altered some obsolete references.

3. This is not the only definition of culture that could be used; it is just a relatively easy one. For a discussion of the use of the culture concept in Chinese studies, see the work of Judith Farquhar and James Hevia (1993).

4. As Lydia Liu (1995) has argued, it is not a simple (or ultimately, perhaps, even desirable) task to sort out what components of contemporary thinking and common sense might have a purely local (in this case Chinese) origin and history.

5. A particularly interesting example of such journalism has been conducted by Jianying Zha (1995).

6. See the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996, 83–85), for a discussion of the problem of repetition in cultural explanation. In this context he also proposes that ephemerality itself is a source of considerable pleasure, a point quite consistent with the present argument.

7. The term "thick description" is drawn from the essay of the same name by Clifford Geertz (1973b). For a pertinent critique of cultural anthropology's responses to social change, see the work of Vincent Pecora (1989).

8. I am here bracketing any epistemological interest in technical Chinese medical discourses, focusing instead on what might be thought of as the appropriations of professional Chinese medicine in popular genres. This is not to say, however, that top professionals in the field are not often themselves the very agents of this appropriation.

9. This collection process that renders surfaces visible in ways quite distinct from the visibilities of everyday life is the very definition of the clinical, and a continuation of processes begun with the birth of the clinic (Foucault 1973).

10. Chinese medicine has an analogous practice and literature in tongue diagnosis. Thinking about the textbook under discussion here has helped me to understand why—in the early 1980s, when this publication practice was brand new—I found the color plates of gummy, flaky, and discolored tongues in diagnosis textbooks rather shocking and disturbing. These images seemed at the very least an invasion of the privacy of the patients concerned, even though their identities could not be discerned from the close-up shots. (And, of course, Chinese patients tended to have a very different idea of privacy than I did.)

11. This date may impress some as a bit early. I base it on the emergence of psychology as an explicit interest in Chinese medical literature in the mid-1980s.

12. A study of the use of the second-person, "you," as a form of direct address to the reader, would be an interesting way of reading popular nonfiction genres. Thus far I have the impression that the second person is used in the self-health literature in a way that marks especially "popular" and "accessible" genres. The device is arguably an important tool of psychological reality production.

13. This is, of course, more what psychoanalysis attempts, though not without some of the same crippling abstractions I here attribute to popular psychology.

14. The middle term in "xinlixue" is most conventionally written without the *wang* radical on the left, and thus (in this context) means "inner." A common variant, however, renders the word with the wang radical, giving it the meaning of "patterns." This usage parallels the words for physiology (*shenglixue*) and pathology (*binglixue*) in Chinese medicine and thus is not surprising. Hence my gloss here of "xinlixue" as the study of the inner patterns of the heart-mind.

15. I have elsewhere considered the ideological holism and practical multiplicity of professional Chinese medicine in modern China, as has Volker Scheid (2002). Scheid's study demonstrates especially clearly the complicity of Chinese medical theory, especially its tendency to totalize the field, with the state agenda since 1949. He shows, however, that this "holism" and "harmony" have been built in parallel with social processes that systematically diversify Chinese medicine in practice.

16. Indeed, one small genre of recent publications in public health is "how to find a doctor" guides; these mass-marketed lists of hospitals, clinics, and specialists, covering both regional and national services, meet the new need for information about both private and government health care, stemming from the fact that the old, nested hierarchies of services run by the government are defunct.

17. *Health and Happiness World* 5 (May 1997). This journal is published by the National Administration of Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy.

18. The most active area of traditional medical-health education in the mass media is television, which is outside the scope of this chapter. But it is worth noting that hospitals, clinics, and successful individual practitioners are verging on the infomercial genre as they "educate" the viewing public with numerous lengthy specials on Chinese medical therapies and regimens.

19. I base this observation on conversations with academics in Beijing in 1997. (But also see, for example, Jianying Zha's [1995, 19–20] study.)

20. The literature of the wounded (or scar literature) was a term used to refer to some of the fiction and essays that appeared in popular venues in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

21. I here invoke norms and normativity in Chinese society as if they functioned quite similarly to their parallels in U.S. life. This is not necessarily the case, of course. But it is hard to avoid the sense that certain very strong, normative expectations condition many kinds of daily life in modern China. I know of no extended study that focuses on this issue, unfortunately.

[3] TOM BOELLSTORFF

ZINES AND ZONES OF DESIRE

Mass-Mediated Love, National Romance, and Sexual Citizenship in *Gay* Indonesia

It is night; in the back of a house in the city of Surabaya, at the eastern end of Java, is a room where two *gay* men complete a new edition of the zine *GAYa Nusantara* (GN). At a table, Joko, one of the men, bends down over a ledger; with pen and ruler, he extends inked lines horizontally from a list of about 250 subscribers from across Indonesia, tabulating who has paid for the upcoming issue. Indra, the other man, sits before an old computer, adding final touches to the new issue of the zine before sending it to a local print shop. He looks down, then up again, entering a handwritten story sent from a *gay* man from a small Sumatran town. All that remains is the short stack of letters from men who wish to be included in the personals section. Next to the letters lies the glossy photograph of a *gay* man from Bali; as this month's cover boy, his smoldering eyes will greet those who take *GAYa Nusantara* into their hands.

On the eastern coast of the island of Borneo, in the city of Samarinda, is a network of *gay* men: some hail from local Dayak and Banjar ethnic groups, and others are migrants from elsewhere in Indonesia. On this day, I am sitting in the windowless, rented room of Haru, a man from Java, when he removes a worn copy of *GAYa Nusantara* from a small, locked cupboard. He shares each new edition with *gay* friends, including Awi, an ethnic Banjar from Samarinda who lives with his sister and her husband and children. None of these family members know Awi is *gay*, but Awi tells me that when he reads *GAYa Nusantara* he is not alone. He has even contacted *GAYa Nu-*

santara to volunteer as a cover boy; they replied that cover boys have been selected for the next several issues, but once the backlog is cleared, he too can be a face of *gay* Indonesia.

These two vignettes, drawn from my fieldwork, hint at how the circulation of texts by *gay* Indonesians shapes notions of subjectivity and community under conditions of significant social marginalization. These texts—a relatively unknown genre of Indonesian print media—are the subject of this chapter. Since 1982 *gay* Indonesians have been producing what I will call *gay* zines. I use the term "*gay*" because this is the most common term for the sexuality under consideration here (others include *G*, *homo*, and *hémong*). I aim to demonstrate the connections between the systems of meaning deployed by the producers and consumers of these zines on the one hand and Indonesian national discourse on the other. As a result, I italicize the term *gay* throughout to indicate it is an Indonesian-language term, not reducible to the English term "gay," despite the clear links between them. *Gay* men differ in many ways from gay men; for instance, they usually marry women and assume this does not contradict their being *gay*, and they rarely use metaphors of the closet or speak of "coming out" (Boellstorff 1999, 2005, 2007). Above all, *gay* sexuality is shaped by discourses of the Indonesian nation-state in a way that gay sexuality is not.

As privately circulated, small-scale publications, *gay* zines challenge definitions of "mass" media, providing unique insights into the relationship between print technologies, sexual subjectivities, and narratives of belonging. In particular, the producers and readers of *gay* zines do not see them as countercultural; they see the zines as part and parcel of the national character of *gay* sexuality, embodying and demonstrating the worthiness of *gay* Indonesians for social inclusion. My goal is to show how zines could hold such meaning. These zines are permeated with two zones of desire—homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging. (I use "zone" as roughly equivalent to "discourse.") Zines relate these two zones in the idea that love (*cinta*) can be the ultimate *prestasi*, a word meaning both "good deed" and "performance," indicating to society that *gay* people are worthy of national inclusion. In these zines, *gay* Indonesians assume that prestasi must be visible to society to have these effects of inclusion. Since speaking positively of same-sex love in Indonesia is difficult, however, love fails as a prestasi. Belonging is deferred, and tropes of separation permeate *gay* zines as a result. Thus, although same-gender desire is clearly sexual, I argue

that the second zone of desire—for national belonging—is sexualized in a manner not exclusive to *gay* Indonesians. *Gay* zines reveal a wide-ranging heterosexist logic of sexual citizenship at the heart of the very real "national culture" of postcolonial Indonesia.

As Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein note in their introduction, a key question explored by multiple authors in this volume is the following: "How, specifically, do transnational media help constitute the complex relationships between erotic yearning and other desires and fantasies?" This chapter examines such relationships by focusing on an "interzone" between forms of desire that are global (like "*gay*") and national (like "Indonesia"). Its particular contribution is to home in on a particular moment within transnational imaginaries of desire: the very fact that they are transnational underscores how the nation-state plays a foundational yet historically contingent and variable role in the articulation of the global modern. The nation-state remains, in practicality, the only game in town for imagining geopolitical translocality: the map of the world is a patchwork of nations—not distributed empires, kingdoms, or city-states. Despite the great diversity in nation-state forms, to lose sight of the nation's contemporary preeminence is to rob ourselves of a problematic and a method for addressing how desire and belonging articulate within the specific social and economic orders in which we live.

Production and Consumption

In the United States, zines originated with sci-fi fanzines in the 1930s and 1940s, reappeared in the 1980s with punk counterculture, and became a full-fledged genre in the 1990s (Duncombe 1997, 6–8; R. S. Friedman 1997, 9–13). One attempt at definition describes them as "noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves" (Duncombe 1997, 6). In many respects, this is an apt characterization of the print media created by *gay* Indonesians, and for this reason, I use "zine" as the best rough English equivalent for these texts.

My primary data source is a textual analysis of the complete run of nine zines (7,385 pages of text). This represents, to my knowledge and the knowledge of these zines' producers, 100 percent of all *gay* and *lesbi* zines ever produced, from the appearance of the first such zine in 1982 up to November 2001.[1] These zines were published in Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Makassar, and Semarang, with reader contributions from across the nation; three are *lesbi* zines and the rest *gay* zines with, in some cases, occasional *lesbi*

TABLE 3.1 Background Data on *Gay* and *Lesbi* Zines

Zine	Abbreviation used in this chapter	Years published	Published in	Notes
G: Gaya Hidup Ceria	G	1982–84	Semarang	first *gay* zine
Jaka	—	1985–88	Yogyakarta	*gay* zine
GAYa Nusantara (GN)	GN	1987–present	Surabaya	some former staff from G; *gay* zine (with some *lesbi* content)
GAYa Lestari	GL	1994	Jakarta	first *lesbi* zine; published inside GN
MitraS	—	1997–98	Jakarta	*lesbi* zine
Swara Srikandi	—	2000	Jakarta	*lesbi* zine; some former staff from *MitraS*
Jaka-Jaka	JJ	1992–94?	Yogyakarta	some former staff from *Jaka*; *gay* zine
New Jaka-Jaka	NJJ	1997–99?	Yogyakarta	some former staff from *Jaka-Jaka*; *gay* zine
Gaya Betawi (Buku Seri IPOOS)	GB	1994–98	Jakarta	*gay* zine
Media KIE GAYa Celebes	GC	1999–2001?	Makassar (Ujung Pandang)	known as *Paraikatte* for first 3 issues; *gay* zine (with some *lesbi* content)
K-79 (*Gaya Pandanaran*)	—	1993	Semarang	*gay* zine
GAYa Priangan	—	1995	Bandung	*gay* newsletter (not in zine format)

content (see table 3.1). I home in on two elements of these zines: communication between producers and readers (editorials, letters to the zine, and personals ads), and the short stories (*cerita pendek* or *cerpen*) sent in by readers. In this category I also include the genre of autobiographical true-experience narratives (*pengalaman sejati*), also sent in by readers and which do not differ greatly from short stories.[2] I present images from *gay* and *lesbi* zines to reinforce my analysis of the textual materials. A secondary source

of data stems from my fieldwork—primarily in Surabaya (East Java), Makassar (South Sulawesi), and Bali—which includes interacting with *lesbi* and *gay* Indonesians as they create, read, discuss, and exchange zines.[3] With the exceptions of *K-79* and *New Jaka-Jaka* (*NJJ*), I am personally acquainted with the producers of every *gay* and *lesbi* zine that has been produced up to November 2001.

The continuity in zine thematics is notable, given that one might see the time period of *gay* zines, 1982 to 2001, as a time of great change in Indonesia. I can offer several hypotheses to explain this continuity. First, the nineteen-year period 1982–2001 was actually a time of remarkable stability—enforced by an authoritarian government—if compared with similar periods before it, for instance, 1965–81, 1948–64, or 1931–47. Second, 1982–2001 was the period during which the *gay* subject position came into its own as a conceivable way of life, if one largely hidden from Indonesian society and rarely claimed as an identity. The *gay* subject position appears to have emerged in the 1970s, becoming a socially self-conscious national network of primarily (but not solely) urban friendship networks, and occasionally organizations, in the 1980s and 1990s. It originated through transforming conceptions of homosexuality from outside Indonesia, with little input from "traditional" homosexualities and transgenderisms (Boellstorff 2005, 2007).

Gay zines are usually 8.5 inches by 6.5 inches (the size of an A4 piece of paper folded in half), or, more rarely, they are the size of a full A4 piece of paper. They are typically twenty to sixty pages long (occasionally only two pages or as many as eighty) and are produced by groups of two to five *gay* men using Windows-compatible desktop-publishing software. In the early 1980s (and occasionally later), they were produced on typewriters, with a physical cut-and-paste layout. Producers of *gay* zines are usually in their twenties or early thirties. One reason for this is that heterosexual marriage makes it more difficult to have the free time necessary to produce a zine. Another is that because Indonesians did not start calling themselves *gay* in large numbers before the 1990s, there are relatively few older men who consider themselves *gay*. The zines are reproduced at family-run photocopy shops or print houses and distributed by hand and through mail. They rarely carry advertising, in marked contrast to most Indonesian print media since the eighteenth century (Adam 1995, 3–4). *Gay* zines are published without government approval and as a result are almost never sold publicly (no zine has ever had a print run over eight hundred).[4] They are often given away for free or sold for about the same price as a regular magazine (400 rupiah for the first zine in 1982; six thousand rupiah for *GAYa Nusantara* in the early

2000s, or about seventy-five cents). Although reports of zine subscribers as well as my own fieldwork clearly indicate that copies of zines are circulated among friends, even if (following the estimate of some *gay* zine publishers) one assumes that each exemplar is read by ten persons, this translates to a total readership of at most seven thousand for any one zine and a generous estimate of eight thousand readers of all *gay* and *lesbi* zines at any point in time.[5] To date all *gay* (and *lesbi*) zines have been published from cities, but the heavy interchange between rural, semirural, and urban Indonesia means that they have a rural readership as well.

Most Indonesians who produce and read *gay* zines already see themselves as *gay*, because of encounters with the terms in regular mass media (Boellstorff 2005). Since zines are published and circulated outside official channels, their consumption is rarely solitary. Most people who read zines were apparently first given the zine by someone else and often continue to exchange zines with friends, even if they become subscribers. The consumption of these zines sustains *gay* networks, rather than alienating the reader from preexisting kinship or community ties. In other words, if and when *gay* Indonesians begin to read zines, this tends not to isolate them but can lead to the creation of new networks through the trading of zines.[6]

That these zines do not appear to introduce Indonesians to *gay* subjectivities does not mean, however, that they have no influence on the character of these subjectivities. For instance, the longest-running and most widely distributed zine, *GAYa Nusantara*, combines in its name *gaya* (which means "style" but can also mean "gay," with the first three letters capitalized) with *nusantara* (which means both "archipelago" and, colloquially, Indonesia itself). This is meant to recall the archipelago concept (*wawasan nusantara*), a key trope of national ideology analogous to (if more formalized than) the "melting pot" in the United States.[7] Since this zine began publishing in 1987, about one-half of *gay* groups (and several *lesbi* groups) have named themselves with reference to *GAYa Nusantara* by pairing *GAYa* with a "local" term, even if the group does not publish a zine. Groups named in this manner that have published a zine include GAYa Celebes, in Sulawesi, and GAYa Betawi, in Jakarta. Zines named in this manner include *GAYa LEStari*, a *lesbi* zine from Jakarta. Groups without zines include GAYa Siak, in Sumatra; GAYa Tepian Samarinda, in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo); GAYa Semarang, in Java; GAYa Dewata, in Bali; and GAYa Intim, in Ambon (which became defunct in the early 1990s). In 1993 the zine *K-79*, published from the city of Semarang, in Central Java, changed its name to *GAYa Pandanaran* (after the hero of a local myth) with the following explanation:

Di tahun ini nampaknya banyak sekali muncul organisasi GAY, semoga dengan munculnya wajah baru dengan beraneka GAYA kita akan menambah persatuan dan kesatuan antara sesama.

This year we see the emergence of very many GAY organizations; we hope that with the emergence of these new faces with diverse STYLES we will add to the unity and integrity between us. (*GAYa Pandanaran* 3:8)

The tropes apparent in this excerpt are common in zines from the early 1980s to the present. As indicated by the use of set nationalist phrases "persatuan dan kesatuan" (unity and integrity) and the term "aneka" (diversity), as well as the metonymic chain linking *gay* to "gaya" and "gaya" to "nusantara," the use of *GAYa* is part of a larger pattern of migration, letter writing, and imagining through which *lesbi* and *gay* Indonesians see themselves as national. This concept underscores how the ultimate impact of *gay* and *lesbi* zines will be certainly greater than the level of readership alone might imply: as is true for mass media generally, their effects on social relations and cultural logics are multilayered and contingent.

As noted earlier, this chapter focuses upon the intersection of two of the most pervasive discourses or zones in *gay* zines—homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging. While occasionally the topic of explicit commentary, these discourses (and their intersections) are often implicit. The analytic I bring to this material parallels that commonly found in ethnography, in which the goal is not simply to report what people say they do but also to interpret the broader cultural grammars within which their invested actions make sense to them, even if, as in the case of language itself, such grammars are not always available for conscious reflection: "It is far too positivist a conceit to presume that we can extract directly from our informants' narratives all we need in order to understand the significations of media" (Mankekar and Schein, this volume).

Love and the Nation in Indonesian Print Media

Susan Rodgers (1995, 3) has written, "Personal narratives have deep public resonance in twentieth-century Indonesia, where the process of growing to adulthood and traversing a life is often recalled in terms similar to those used to think about society and the past in a more general sense. . . . In other words, Indonesian historical memory and personal memory are both animated by certain closely related key scenarios and social images, and societal histories and personal narratives interpenetrate." *Gay* zines link personal narrative, love, and national consciousness in a manner consistent with

tropes of Indonesian literature. Late colonial literature brought together nation, people, and language through the power of love (*cinta*, less often *kasih sayang* or *kasih*), particularly around the conflict over "arranged" marriages (associated with tradition) versus "love" marriages (associated with modernity and nationalism). Such conflicts figure centrally in nationalist literature, condensing debates over tradition, modernity, choice, and collective identity.[8] This literature frames love as selfless when directed toward the nation or hoped-for spouse: "Nationalism and love are linked because through it, peoples are mixed and a new authority is created" (Siegel 1998, 16). This is a love that "demands recognition" and is "inseparable from the struggle for progress" (Siegel 1997, 140). By definition it breaks from ethnolocalized custom (*adat*). This national love reproduces the nation over time through heterosexualized procreation, but its force inheres more directly in its ability to fashion a proper citizen-subject. Proper love makes you a proper citizen. It is for this reason that the failure of national love is not barrenness, but sickness (*sakit*)—an unnational love that can kill:

> What would the cure for love sickness be if not proper recognition, that is, recognizing cinta for what it is: *the power to compel recognition*. More precisely, it is the power to compel recognition of desire transformed into idealism. That idealism is directed towards the advancement of the Indonesian people. At that time [in the 1920s and 1930s], this meant not independence and not equality. It meant rather *the possibility of having a certain identity*. One which marked one as progressive. A progressive person was in touch with the modern world outside the Indies. (Siegel 1997, 146; emphasis added)

Thanks to a love that operates through choice rather than arrangement, Indonesian national literature enacts the "twin approach to constructing a modern self and imagining a modern society," whereby "in gaining a modern self, [Indonesians] gain a modern vision of the world, and vice versa. Selfhood becomes permeated with political meaning" (Rodgers 1995, 44). In the decades before independence, love, modernity, and national belonging became interlinked. This pattern's legacy continues to shape Indonesian literature and society, where arranged marriages are now quite rare and both women and men are typically assumed to play an active role in choosing their future spouses (Hatley 1997; Hull 2002; see also Brenner 1998; Tiwon 1996; Watson 2000). This is a love that does not just happen to you through arrangement but is also performed through choice.

Performatives depend on cultural context: only an umpire can declare a strike, and only a judge or jury can pronounce someone not guilty in a

court of law. The ability of love to compel national recognition in Indonesia depends on a modern conception of heterosexual desire (termed, like *gay*, with transformed English terms: *normal* or *hetero*). *Gay* love does not give one national belonging: heteronormativity lies at the heart of national cinta.[9] When marriage is arranged, sexual orientation is secondary. However, when marriage hinges on choice—on a relational, choosing self animated by love—that self and that love fail, are sick, if not heterosexual. Choice, to be national and modern, must be heterosexual choice. It is through heterosexuality that self and nation articulate.

While being lovesick (*sakit cinta*) is, as James T. Siegel notes, a powerful theme in Indonesian nationalist literature, "sick person" (*orang sakit*) is ironically now a term that some *gay* Indonesians use to refer to themselves. How can a sick love complete its circuit of recognition? This is the crucial question addressed in *gay* zines, the question for which prestasi will be the answer. Love, for *gay* Indonesians, is also a desire for sexual citizenship. A key point in this regard is that while gender and sexuality obviously intersect, they are also analytically distinct and one should not conflate them. Even though *gay* Indonesians address a sense of failure (to belong) in *gay* zines, they do not experience this in terms of gender per se. They do not feel that they are failures as men; they do not feel, for instance, that they are male-to-female transvestites (*waria* or *banci*). Although *warias*, who are acknowledged if often ridiculed members of Indonesian society, have never published zines, despite the fact that many have the educational skills to do so, zines have proven an enduring means by which *gay* men, far less socially acknowledged than warias, make claims for a national belonging that feels beyond their grasp.

First Zone: Homosex and Homolove

One zone of desire in *gay* zines is homosex: the celebration of sexuality between men (and between women, in the case of *lesbi* zines). Positive discussion of homosexuality appears in virtually no other Indonesian mass media beyond these zines, where it is a constant theme of personal ads, editorials, dictionaries of *gay* language, guides to outdoor meeting areas (*tempat ngeber*), and images (see figures 3.1–3.4).[10] Moreover, homosexuality is a guiding force in the narratives that make up the bulk of *gay* zines.

Rarely do these images and narratives present explicit sex (see figures 3.3 and 3.4 for exceptions). Obviously this is not because *gay* Indonesians are uninterested in eroticism, nor is this simply to avoid censorship, since zines are not published through legal channels anyway. When publishers of *gay*

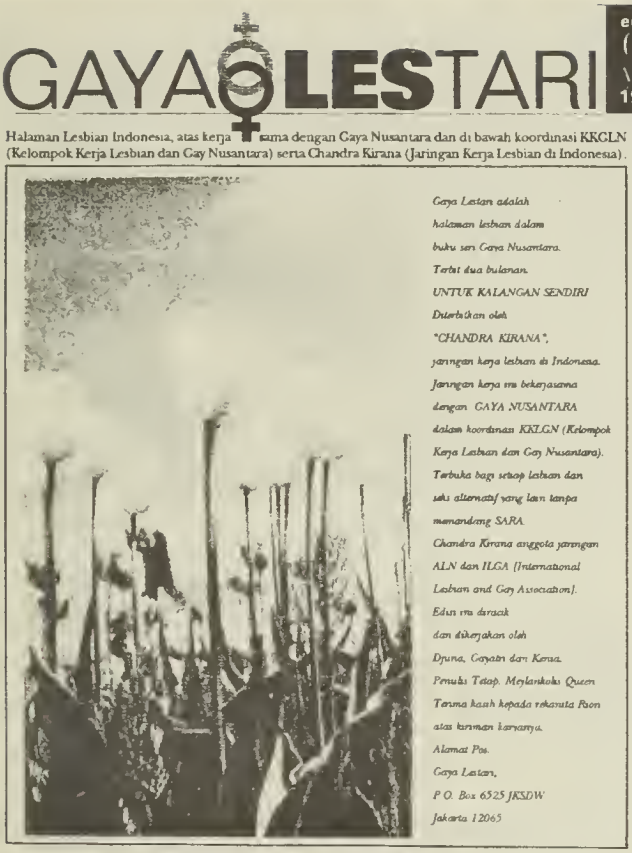
3.1 and **3.2.** Objects of male and female homosexual desire (*GN* 1994, 31, cover; *GL* 1994, 3:16, inside *GN* 31). The erotics involved can concern desire for bodies (fig. 3.1) or sexual acts (fig. 3.2).

3.3 and **3.4.** Explicit homosex and sex with Euroamericans (*K-79* 1993,16; *GN* 1998, 4:31).

zines politely reject requests for sexually explicit stories or images, they cite not a fear of censorship but the possible foreclosing of recognition, of acceptance by society (*diterima oleh masyarakat*). It is a wish that the zine be proper (*sopan*), a wish expressed not only by publishers but by readers who send in letters complaining of explicit representations of sex. The most striking example of this took place in 1993, when *GAYa Betawi* (*GB*) published two fifth issues. The first fifth issue contained explicit representations of sex between men (both line drawings and reproductions of Euroamerican gay pornography). The editorial in the following issue noted that the first had been found invalid (*tidak sah*) because it had "gone against the ethical codes of journalism and society" (*GB* 1993, 5:3). This is the only case of any *gay* zine republishing an issue. The following issue noted that the general magazine *Jakarta-Jakarta* had covered the zine (and the organization that produced it) for the first time, but had unfortunately focused on the sexually explicit issue, giving the impression that *gay* men were only interested in sex, when in fact the goal of the zine and organization was to create unity (*persatuan*, a nationalist term) among *gay* men and get them to do positive things for society (*GB* 1993, 6:24–25).

Despite this deemphasis of sex, erotics remain present in zines, appearing in stories that speak of sexual acts (often in veiled terms) as well as imagery that emphasizes the face (and often the partially clothed body). One difference between *gay* and *lesbi* zines is that there have been very few images of *lesbi* women and none in any state of undress. Images of *lesbi* women are typically in the form of drawings, while images of *gay* men are fairly evenly divided between photographs and drawings. This does not seem linked to the admonitions against showing the female body in Islam, since eroticized images of Indonesian women are common in contemporary Indonesian advertising and entertainment. The absence of photographs of *lesbi* women seems instead to flag questions of visibility (see figures 3.5 and 3.6). While few *gay* men wish to appear in electronic or print media, even with a false name, a surprising number are eager to appear in zines as cover boys, providing photographs and even home addresses. The number of *gay* men willing to be photographed is still small in absolute terms, but even fewer *lesbi* women are willing to be photographed; a greater tendency to either be dependent on a husband or family members for financial support—or, if they are higher class, to be in a career where female propriety is emphasized—makes such visibility an even greater risk.

What *gay* and *lesbi* zines emphasize is not sex but love. Reading over seven thousand pages of zine text, I did not find a single issue of any *gay* zine



GAYA LESTARI

edisi 05 April 1994

Halaman Lesbian Indonesia, atas kerja sama dengan Gaya Nusantara dan di bawah koordinasi KKGLN (Kelompok Kerja Lesbian dan Gay Nusantara) serta Chandra Kirana (Jaringan Kerja Lesbian di Indonesia).

Gaya Lestari adalah halaman lesbian dalam buku seri Gaya Nusantara. Terbit dua bulanan.
UNTUK KALANGAN SENDIRI
Diterbitkan oleh "CHANDRA KIRANA", jaringan kerja lesbian di Indonesia. Jaringan kerja ini bekerjasama dengan GAYA NUSANTARA dalam koordinasi KKLGN (Kelompok Kerja Lesbian dan Gay Nusantara). Terbuka bagi setiap lesbian dan aksi alternatif yang lain tanpa memandang SARA.
Chandra Kirana anggota jaringan ALN dan ILGA [International Lesbian and Gay Association].
Edisi ini disusun dan dikerjakan oleh Dyuna, Gayatri dan Kenia.
Penulis Tetap: Meylankolis Queen
Terima kasih kepada rekanita Pion atas kerjasama kerjanya.
Alamat Pos:
Gaya Lestari,
P.O. Box 6525 JKSDW
Jakarta 12065

Kembangkanlah dirimu.

3.5 and **3.6.** Women as flowers: a symbol of *lesbi* community and social invisibility (GL 1994, 5:1, inside GN 28). The text identifies the zine as part of the "Archipelago Lesbian and Gay Network" and as open to all ethnicities. On the back cover, a flower with the caption "develop yourself"; *kembangkanlah* is from *kembang*, meaning "bloom" and "develop."

in which the topic of love does not appear. Often two or three articles will have "cinta" in their titles. A first clue to this discourse of love is a particular semiotic chain: sexual acts (kissing, anal penetration, rubbing genitals together, and so on) are distinguished from generalized sexual lust (*nafsu* or *birahi*), which in turn is distinguished from love. One reader of *GAYa Nusantara* complained of sexually suggestive images by invoking this chain: "I don't want to be a hypocrite because even I have a million sexual desires. But, what is more valuable than all that, friends, is *Cinta*. Love is what's given me the strength to live this long . . . What will happen if we continue to allow lust to hold the reins of this life, which is already set apart?" (*GN* 1988, 3:6–7). In a short story from 1991, Andre confronts his *gay* friend Yuzo, who seems interested only in sex. Andre confesses his love to Yuzo, who asks, "Why have you been avoiding me?" Andre replies: "Because you just think of me as a sexual object! I can't live like you, switching partners and forgetting them. I desire a proper and *normal* life like *hetero* people, to meet someone and fall in love with them so as to live together. I can't live prioritizing sex over love" (*GN* 1991, 15:29–30). In one installment of a comic strip that ran in *Jaka* from August 1985 to December 1986, the protagonist (also named *Jaka*, or "bachelor") becomes promiscuous after his lover, Tomo, marries a woman. Tomo learns of Jaka's behavior, and in the final two panels (see figure 3.7, bottom right corner), he confronts Jaka at the gym: "This is the image of '*gay*' that you present to me! Apparently it's true that you're just chasing satisfaction of your lusts!" In the following issue, Jaka runs away to Europe and with the help of a white boyfriend—whom he does not love—sets up a salon business. Sitting alone at night, he confesses to himself: "Now I can buy anything I want with my money, but what I need now is 'love!' Where I can share good and bad times, serve his needs. That has no price . . . oh, how beautiful it would be!" (*Jaka* 1986, 6:14). When a man who saw himself as *normal* had sex with a man and wanted to know if he might be *gay*, the editors of *GAYa Betawi* responded: "To become *gay* is not just proven with same-gender sex but other factors like the feeling of love . . . if after that event you continue to have same-sex relations with the addition of feelings of love, . . . it could then be said that you are *gay*" (*GB* 1997, 16:24). Employing nationalist language, an article sent into the zine *K-79* in 1993 noted that "love unites [*mempersatukan*] us. . . . Without love we are nothing, creatures without connection. . . . When will it be that we can find a pure love that is not based on lust and selfishness?" (*K-79* 1993, 4:7–8).

The pattern is clear: sex is displaced onto desire and then onto love, with each term more valorized than its predecessor.[11] Desire is presented as uni-

12
Serial :
SANG JAKA
· MENGGIRING ANGIN
Oleh : Tito
AKHIRNYA , TOMO MENIKAH
PERKAWINAN ITU MEMANG 'SEJIN' ? JAKA , DAN JAKA SENDIRI MENERIMA DENGAN TABAH DAN HATI TEGAR ' NAMUN PUTUS CINTA TAK MUDAH OBATNYA ITULAH JANG DIALAMI JAKA SEKARANG
HAI TOMO, ENGKAU ADALAH LAKI-LAKI PERTAMA YANG MEMBUATKU MENGERTI APA ARTI SEORANG LELAKI BAGIKU. KENAPA ENGKAU JUGA YANG MEMBUATKU BETAPA PEDIHNYA DITINGGALKAN LAKI-LAKI ?
AH KENAPA AKU HARUS MEMIKIR KAN DIA ? DIA TOH BISA BAHAGIA DENGAN "JALAN"NYA ? - AKUPUN HARUS BISA BAHAGIA DENGAN JALANKU SENDIRI ' LAKI-LAKI TOH TIDAK HANYA DIA ?
JAKA MULAI BERPETUALANG ! MENCARI KEHANGATAN DI PELUKAN LELAKI HOMO YANG SATU KE YANG LAIN . . . . .
LAKI KELAMAN TOMO MENDENGAR PERBUATAN JAKA
MENGAPA KAU LAKU-KAN ITU, SAYANG ? APAKAH KAU TAK BER-FIKIR TENTANG RESIKO?
MAAF ' PERBUATANMU BODOH ! KAU ABAIKAN KULIAHMU HANYA KARENA MENGEJAR NAFSUMU PADA SETIAP LELAKI ? JADI INIKAH GAMBARAN "GAY" SEPERTI APA YANG SELA-MA KAU UTARAKAN PADAKU ' TERNYATA BENAR HANYA MENGEJAR KEPUASAN SAHWAT DAN SELALU MEMBUJUK PEMUDA-PEMUDA

3.7. The valorization of love over desire (*Jaka* 1985, 5:12).

directional, while love is framed as inherently relational and thus social, proper to a citizen-subject who gives and receives. In Foucauldian terms, this is not repression but an incitement that beckons sex and desire into the service of love. This incitement takes the form of the discovery that the desired Other reciprocates love; that is, the desired Other recognizes a person as *gay*. Even when self-knowledge is the theme, recognition usually figures prominently. And this also occurs in *lesbi* zines, as in the autobiographical narrative of Leonie, a *lesbi* woman: "When I was in my second year of high school, I was invited by a girlfriend to watch a porno film and by chance that

film had a *lesbi* scene. There I got to know the life of *lesbi* in bed. Then with another girlfriend, for the first time I acted out such a scene and lost my virginity" (*GN* 1989, 10:37). In the short story "I Reach for My Love," the protagonist, Koko, is in high school and attracted to Yogi, a young man one class ahead of him. Yogi has been following Koko around, but Yogi's motivations remain obscure to Koko while he is *masih bodoh*, or "still stupid" (a phrase often used in nationalist literature to refer to premodern ways of thinking). One day, however, Koko recalls: "As we were walking home, Yogi explained the contents of his heart to me. Before he had spoken very long, it was clear that the path of his life was almost identical to my own autobiography [*otobiografi*]. My feelings at that point were like a fish splashing into the water, or a bowl meeting its lid" (*Jaka* 1985, 1:11–14).

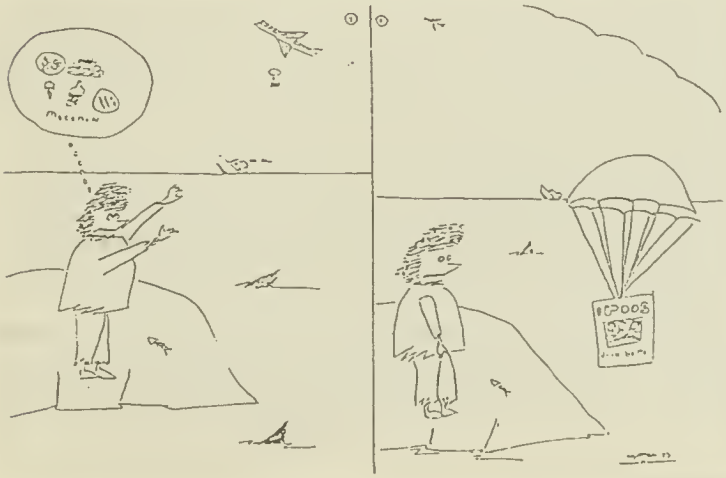
There is joy in discovery, and discovery in these narratives is the discovery of recognition. It is a climactic, almost orgasmic moment, as when fish meets water or bowl meets lid. For some *gay* men, but especially for *lesbi* women, the period prior to discovery is marked by isolation, a sense of being an island alone in a sea of heteronormativity (see figure 3.8). Since it is self-evident to *gay* Indonesians (and other Indonesians) that the concept *gay* originates neither in locality nor tradition, the moment of discovery—when one is recognized, when the desired Other becomes a desiring Other—replaces feelings of isolation with a sense of belonging to a national homosex community. This founding in the nation shapes the sense of an archipelagic, imagined communion with lesbian and gay persons across the national archipelago and outside Indonesia as well (see figure 3.9). These implicit cultural linkages between zines, isolation, and an archipelagic imaginary occasionally become the topic of commentary (see figure 3.10). In an archipelagic twist on the trope of the deserted island, a man dreaming of food finds a zine parachuted to him as a source of sustenance. Behind the image (meant for an Indonesian readership where everyone lives on an island) is an archipelagic zone of homosex desire, with zines connecting "islands" of persons and communities.

Separation

In the short story "A Thought," the protagonist, Iwan, falls in love with a *normal* friend, Soni. He decides he must be honest about his self (*jati dirinya*) and asks Soni, "If you had a friend who turned out to be *gay*, what would be your reaction?" Soni replies he would feel "just as usual," and a surprised Iwan tells Soni he is *gay* and loves him. Soni then admits that he has a "secret" of his own: he is *gay* and reciprocates Iwan's love. Iwan is shocked

3.8. "Lonely in the midst of the bustle" (GN 1994, 27:7).

3.9. Translocal community: the hangout (*tempat ngeber*) "Kalifornia," located on a bridge near a major shopping mall in central Surabaya (GN 1994, 29:28).



3.10. Zines linking persons beyond their "islands" (GB 1993, 6:30).

by the dual discovery: "Soni, who's always being chased by women, who's handsome, who's smart, who has so many achievements [prestasi], is *gay* too!" Iwan is full of happiness, but the following week learns that Soni has moved to Australia without leaving word (*GN* 1997, 51:35). Iwan, and the zine reader, are left in the dark.

Whereas discovery involves recognition by the now-desiring Other, in *gay* zines this circuit usually leads to separation. "Happily ever after" stories in which two *gay* men share a household or sustain an ongoing relationship are rare. *Gay* zines portray separation as the inevitable complement to discovery: one recounting of a *gay* man's life in Yogyakarta concludes, "Like the classic *gay* story, he had to be separated from his boyfriend," when the boyfriend left town to continue his schooling (*NJJ* 1997, 3:26). Sometimes a general sense of social rejection leads to separation. In the true-experiences story "Perpisahan" (Separation), the *gay* protagonist tells his lover they must separate after two years, because the protagonist's mother has discovered the relationship: "You forget that we live in society, we cannot live apart from it, and we can't just do anything we want. Sometimes society can be more cruel than we suspect" (*GN* 1994, 30:20).

Lesbi and *gay* zines often portray some force as causing separation by coming "between" love. In the true-experiences story "Between Love and Greed," Rion, a *lesbi* woman, falls in love with Mira, glamorous, beautiful, and married to Franz. Franz thinks that Rion is just Mira's friend and allows them to spend time together. Rion and Mira discover love for each other, and Mira leaves Franz, but because Rion cannot keep Mira in the glamorous lifestyle to which she is accustomed, "Mira [decides] to return to Franz's embraces" (*GL* 1994, 5:8–9, in *GN* 28). In another true-experiences story, "Between Duty and Love," the *gay* protagonist falls in love with a civil servant temporarily filling a position in a small Central Sulawesi town. Once his two-week shift is completed, the civil servant's duty is to return to Manado (North Sulawesi). On their final night together, the civil servant begs forgiveness in national terms: "We both serve the needs of our country and people" (*GN* 1993, 22:20). In a third such story, "Between Love, Parents, and Studies," Edo, a *gay* man from Biak, a small island near the island of New Guinea, encounters problems when his boyfriend's former lover calls Edo's parents to tell them Edo is having sex with another man. Edo's fanatically Christian parents beat him and forbid him to see his lover. Here the boyfriend's former lover commits a kind of anti-prestasi that separates Edo from both *gay* community and family (*GN* 1997, 48:23–25).[12]

The overall dynamic of *gay* zine narratives, then, is one of discovery fol-

lowed by separation from a beloved Other. *Gay* Indonesians discover recognition, but the person who makes this recognition possible—the *gay* lover—is placed beyond reach. This narrative structure predominates despite the fact that it is not a simple reflection of *gay* experience. While their lives can be hard, many *gay* men do continue same-sex romances after heterosexual marriage. The attraction of these narratives lies in how they narrativize and concretize a belief that being *gay* involves a profound sense of separation. What gives this separation its special sting in *gay* zines, a sense not just of desire thwarted but of selfhood called into question? The answer lies in the nexus between love and nation.

Second Zone: National Sexualities

While the first zone of desire is concerned with homosex and homolove, the second relates to the sense that the *gay* subject position has a national scale. Three factors sustain this linkage to national culture: language, a deemphasis of the local and ethnic (which are often conceptually conflated [Boellstorff 2002]), and a deemphasis of Euroamerica. All *gay* and *lesbi* zines ever published have used Indonesian, never an ethnolocalized language like Javanese, Balinese, or Batak, except for occasional terms suggesting local color.[13] Since zines are published informally, this use of Indonesian is not simply kowtowing to state policy. My fieldwork indicates that it simply has never occurred to these Indonesians to publish a zine in any other language. Why make it inaccessible to so many potential readers—the "we" referenced so often in zine writing?

In line with foregrounding the national tongue, *gay* zines invoke an Indonesian personhood. While those calling themselves *gay* may think of themselves in ethnolocalized terms—as Bugis, Javanese, and so on—in some aspects of their lives, in regard to their sexualities, they think of themselves as *Indonesians*. One motivation for this is that the term "*gay*" appears to be universally understood not to be an indigenous concept. I know of no cases where it is believed that one learns the meaning of "*gay*" from one's family or tradition. Such distancing from ethnolocality is encapsulated in names like *GAYa Betawi* and *GAYa Celebes*, where terms indexing ethnolocality are subsumed in a pattern *GAYa X*. Since adjectives follow nouns in Indonesian, this pattern ontologizes the national; the "local" term appears as modifier and *GAYa* (based on *GAYa Nusantara*, a simultaneously "archipelagic" and "Indonesian" style) as the subject.[14] To my knowledge almost every appearance of ethnolocality in *gay* zines has occurred when Dédé Oetomo has published occasional articles on so-called traditional homosexualities and

transgenderisms (collected in Oetomo 2001). These articles appear under the rubric *adat nusantara* (customs of the archipelago). The articles also frame the persons involved as outside the imagined readership of *gay* zines. Their customs are presented as interesting, but never to my knowledge are they set forth as providing an autochthonous pedigree for *gay* subjectivities (and never for *lesbi* subjectivities, since such "traditional" homosexualities and transgenderisms are almost exclusively associated with men).[15]

The world beyond Indonesia plays a relatively minor role in *gay* zines. While *gay* zines occasionally reprint news clips or lengthier articles on gay or lesbian life in the non-Euroamerican world (for example, the Philippines or Brazil), such reportage is intermittent, appearing only sporadically in short stories, poetry, or letters sent in by readers. Euroamerica itself (which for most Indonesians includes Australia and New Zealand) does appear in these zines but is not emphasized. Although *gay* Indonesians clearly understand *gay* to be derived in part from the Euroamerican concept "gay," it is portrayed in national terms. This does not mean that linkages to Euroamerican homosexualities are erased or denied: an archipelagic relationship pertains in which *gay* Indonesians are one island in an openly acknowledged, even celebrated, global archipelago of homosexuality. Such a sense of global belonging with regard to sexuality in no way precludes anti-American or anti-globalization views on political and economic issues. *Gay* zines sustain this archipelagic relationship by referencing Euroamerica, but these references are intermittent, in keeping with the fact that most *gay* Indonesians do not speak English or any Euroamerican language, have never traveled outside Indonesia, and have met lesbian or gay Euroamericans rarely, if at all. *Gay* zines have incorporated Euroamericans since the early 1980s, in the form of drawings (see figure 3.4) or characters in short stories. Recall the white boyfriend of Jaka (see figure 3.7). Euroamericans also appear in stories as tourists falling in love with Indonesian men, and Euroamerican gay men have sent in personal ads to *gay* zines since their beginning. In 1998 *GAYa Nusantara* even ran what was jokingly termed the "white guy edition" (*edisi bule*, no. 54), which included tips on how to respond to personal ads from white men.

Stories on lesbian and gay life in Australia, Europe, and the United States occasionally appear in both *gay* and *lesbi* zines. The *lesbi* zine *MitraS* has run articles on violence against lesbians in the United States (*MitraS* 1997, 1:8) and has even reprinted Euroamerican erotic lesbian short stories (*MitraS* 1998, 2:15–17, 3:15–18). One of the starkest differences between *gay* and *lesbi* zines is that when *lesbi* zines report on Euroamerica they are more likely to

emphasize homophobia and violence against homosexuals, concluding that while things are difficult in Indonesia, *lesbi* women are better off than their Euroamerican sisters (a perspective I have also encountered in my fieldwork). In contrast, *gay* men usually assume Euroamerica is a gay paradise, with "free sex" delinked from bonds of relationship and, at the same time, legal same-sex marriage.[16] Despite these varied ways Euroamerica figures in *gay* and *lesbi* zines, however, its footprint is quite small. Like nationalism, which originated in Euroamerica but is now seen as authentically Indonesian, these sexualities are considered to be founded in the archipelago.

Invoking the Nation

Beyond these implicit references, the nation figures explicitly as a zone of desire, as the background against which *gay* selfhood and community play themselves out. This appears most succinctly in terms like "*Indo*G*sian people*" (*bangsa Indo*G*sia*) (*GN* 1994, 25:40), in which "G," a common written shorthand for *gay*, is literally implanted into the core of "Indonesia." More extended references to the nation are common in editorials. In the first issue of *GAYa Nusantara*, the publishers justified the incorporation of "nusantara" in the zine's name as a reminder of "the special national/archipelagic [*khas nusantara*] lives of *lesbi* and *gay* people," which the publishers hoped would "be reflected and supported by this bulletin" (*GN* 1987, 1:6). When a reader complained that early *GAYa Nusantara* zine covers had too many images of shadow-puppet theater, the publishers replied, "There has been an effort to give *GAYa Nusantara*'s covers themes of the archipelago's culture" (*GN* 1988, 3:6). Six years later, the zine commemorated Independence Day (August 17) with a cover featuring two men standing side by side. One held the red and white Indonesian flag, and the other held the gay rainbow flag originating from San Francisco, modified with two vertical, red and white stripes recalling the national flag. That month's editorial explained:

> This August we remember an important event, the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence 49 years ago. This event could take place . . . because of a surge of new thinking from the beginning of the twentieth century that resulted in nationalism. . . . The *lesbi* and *gay* movement can be compared with this national movement. . . . It's clear that in the communities of the Archipelago there have always been homosexual relations . . . and with the coming of modern civilization there have appeared comprehensive homosexual identities. But, only in the 1980s did homosexual identities become a foundation for a struggle for emancipation and self-empowerment amongst us. Particularly in the 1990s, we see clearly the de-

velopment of *gay* groups in our network, that gain attention of observers within and outside the country. (*GN* 1994, 32:3–4)

Such framing of homosexuality in activist terms by *GAYa Nusantara*'s editors is one of the clearest discrepancies between these zines and the everyday lives of *gay* men, for whom such understandings are rare. What is shared by even the most blatantly political zine writing and everyday *gay* life, however, is a sense of desiring recognition by the nation. This dynamic can be found in other *gay* and *lesbi* zines. The premiere issue of the *lesbi* zine *MitraS* noted that "there is definitely no place for *gay* and *lesbi* to act as freely as those who live on the Western half of the globe, . . . but that doesn't mean that *gay* and *lesbi* in the Western countries are always more lucky than we who live quietly in Indonesia" (*MitraS* 1997, 1:8). Invoking the nationalist trope of "land and water," the editor of *K-79* noted that through the zine readers could "meet with friends of the same fate throughout our lands and waters [*tanah air*] without any barriers" (*K-79* 1993, 2:6). The editors of *GAYa Betawi* noted from early on that their zine was for *gay* men from the "whole archipelago" (*diseluruh nusantara*) (*GB* 1992, 2:1). The editors of *Jaka-Jaka* (*JJ*) once noted that the goal of the zine (and the organization connected to it) was to "build" *gay* people full of skills and self-esteem, so that they could give their best to the "people and nation" (*bangsa dan negara*) (*JJ* 1993, 5:15).

Readers also draw upon national imagery in *gay* zines. The cover boy interviewed in the issue of *K-79* (noted previously) implored readers to "support the unity and integrity [*persatuan dan kesatuan*] between us" (*K-79* 1993, 2:7). Such phrases are common in letters to zines: one reader sent "greetings to the brotherhood of the Indonesian lands and waters" (*persaudaraan setanah air Indonesia*) (*GB* 1997, 15:4). Another exclaimed, "How beautiful it is to have *gay* friends from the whole Archipelago . . . We must be united in line with the third of the Pancasila, 'the unity of Indonesia'" (*GN* 1995, 37:15). (The Pancasila are the five guiding national principles formulated by Sukarno, Indonesia's first president.) Often the appeals found in personal ads are for "friendship with people like me [the purchaser of the ad] from across the archipelago." They sometimes have an explicitly nationalist referent, as in the case of a Sumatran man who wrote, "With a foundation in democracy we struggle for freedom for *gay* people, like other *normal* human beings" (*G* 1982, 1:13). The emphasis is on a national community, and never, to my knowledge, has a personal ad requested someone from a particular ethnicity or region—in contrast to heterosexual personal ads in

Indonesian magazines, which usually specify a desired ethnicity.[17] The desire is for persons from the whole archipelago (*se-Nusantara, setanah air*, or *se-Indonesia*). As one person put it, "After I appeared in the personal ads, I got many letters from friends of the same fate as myself from every corner of the Archipelago. My perspective [*wawasan*] broadened concerning the *gay* world so full of joys and sorrows" (*GN* 1993, 24:11; for a *lesbi* example, see *GL* 1994, 3:6, in *GN* 31).

Prestasi

A poem published in an issue of *GN* from 1990 read as follows:

> In the quiet of my days / Even at night there is no song
> My heart barren / My soul fed up
> You come like a lamp / Lighting up my heart
> Bathing my soul / Humming the rhythm of love
> Let the periodical *GN* / Continue victorious and free
> Come friends! let us make merry / This environment, this place
> Full of peace and joy / For the sake of the *GN* periodical's mission
> (*GN* 1990, 12:16–17)

These invocations of the nation as place co-occur with the invocation of a complementary practice; *gay* zines construe citizenship as an active process, not as a static category of membership. Such practices are called *prestasis* in *gay* zines. This term bears colonial traces; it derives from the Dutch *prestatie*, a noun meaning "achievement" or "feat." The verbal form can mean "achieve" and "perform." In standard Indonesian, "prestasi" also means both to achieve and to perform. Like any performance, prestasis require observers: "hidden prestasi" is an oxymoron. As a result, when *gay* Indonesians refer to prestasi, it is always with an audience in mind, and with one exception noted below, the national or general society (*masyarakat umum*) is that audience, not the *gay* community. Prestasis can involve direct help, such as adopting a child or caring for a sick relative, or they can be personal achievements that reflect favorably on one's community, such as going on the hajj to Mecca if one is Muslim, or succeeding in one's career. The distinguishing characteristic is that a prestasi is positive and fosters social connectivity, in contrast to selfish actions with destructive or centripetal consequences. Prestasis are often described as leading to success (*sukses*), a key New Order state term for the exercise of proper citizenship (Pemberton 1994, 9). The editor of *K-79* once set forth a *Gay* Seven Charm Program (*Sapta Pesona Gay*), including closeness (*keakraban*) and social solidarity (*kesatyakawa-*

nan sosial). This concept transforms the Sapta Pesona devised by the New Order government as principles for encouraging tourism in the early 1990s (e.g., safety and cleanliness), but these *gay* prestasis were conceptualized in reference to national society.

The idea that *gay* persons can do prestasis as well as other Indonesians is a frequent theme in zine editorials. The publishers of *Jaka-Jaka* once wrote: "We all know and perhaps already feel the attitudes and behaviors of most *hetero* people towards *gay* people. . . . Is it right that we be 'goat-class' citizens who only have sex? Of course not! There are many *gay* people who have reached the heights of status. . . . *Gay* people have quality and abilities equal to anyone else. . . . To have meaning and respect, one must have a high level of self-worth and self-respect. For that one must have *prestasis*" (*JJ* 1993, 4:11).

Another Yogyakarta zine mused that "prestasis . . . will become a fortress strong enough to repel those minor tones [of social disapproval]" (*NJJ* 1997, 4:6). In 1998, during the worst period of a currency crisis, an editor of *GN* congratulated *gay* Indonesians for continuing their activities, noting that "[these activities] have an extra value for Indonesian *gay* people in the eyes of *hetero* society, [showing] that we continue to exist and carry out positive activities" (*GN* 1998, 55:5). Zine readers also care about prestasis, as is illustrated by an article titled "What Can *Homos* Do?" written by a reader of *GAYa Nusantara* from Malang in East Java: "We are becoming aware that although we are fated to be *gay* there are still many things that we can do for ourselves, our families, society, our beloved country and people, the Indonesian people. . . . We must 'go public' with our activities . . . and mix with regular society, for instance with social activities that serve society, like rehabilitation centers for handicapped children, the insane, beggars, the homeless, and so on. . . . What's most important is that these efforts have a humanistic character (beyond the goal of helping our own people, but rather aiding humanity in general)" (*GN* 1995, 39:33–35).

As a reader of *GAYa Nusantara* from the town of Kisaran explained in an essay to the zine, "Our *gay* friends who are elites and celebrities with influence must have the courage to open themselves, to show the Indonesian government that *gay* people have prestasis and sukses in all matters and compare to *hetero* people. In this way it's hoped that the opinion of society and the Indonesian government will change of its own accord" (*GN* 2000, 65:33). A cover boy from the town of Mojokerto, when asked his opinion about Indonesian society's view that *gay* men are only interested in sex, replied, "The reality is indeed that *gay* people are always equated with sex. It's

up to how we as *gay* people change that judgement. We can do it with showing our positive attitudes. We can show our prestasis, so that maybe that judgement will eventually go away, and society can accept our existence to the fullest" (*GN* 1999, 59:13–14). The short story appearing in the final issue of *Jaka* closes with a scene in which the protagonist, a young man, reveals himself to his parents. With tears in his eyes, his father says, "You are still our only son and you make us proud. No matter what choices you make in your life, what's important is that you become a person who takes care of himself and is useful to society" (*Jaka* 1988, 18:15). Nine years later, a *gay* man's confessions in a successor zine to *Jaka* echo this theme: "My mother would be sad if I engaged in *free sex* [English in the original] or other frivolous things without reigning myself in. Even if my *gay*ness [*kegayan*] is seen as a shortcoming, I just keep working to be a good child who's devoted to his parents, a good Muslim who prays regularly, a good student with good prestasis. In short, I want my mother to be proud of me. Even though I'm *gay*, I prove that I'm much better than those who are *hetero*" (*NJJ* 1997, 4:12). Such statements consistently emphasize that sex does not qualify as a prestasi.

Given this performative model of citizenship, it makes sense that the act of publishing zines might itself be framed as a prestasi, the only prestasi not directly oriented toward the general public. The editorial in the premiere issue of *GAYa Nusantara*, reflecting on the activities that the zine was to undertake, declared that "all of it has one goal, the acceptance of *gay* and *lesbi* people as a group with the same rights and responsibilities in Indonesian society" (*GN* 1987, 1:2). This sensibility is shared by *lesbi* zines. One editorial in a *lesbi* zine proclaimed, "*Swara* will become our pages that give voice to us" (*Swara* 2000, 1:7). In the premiere issue of the *lesbi* zine *MitraS*, the editors expressed frustration that "there isn't a bit of media that can become a forum for information and communication for us in Indonesia, like what's been carried out by *gay* men with their '*GAYa Nusantara*' . . . so we found the courage to try publishing this 'special' bulletin after consulting with brother Dédé Oetomo" (*MitraS* 1997, 1:3). Thus "beginning from a feeling of concern about the fate of *lesbi* media that are always appearing and then disappearing to unknown places, four *lesbi* in Jakarta met to discuss the possibility of publishing a newsletter. From this discussion came a serious agreement. 'There must be *lesbi* media!'" (*Swara* 2000, 1:6). In 1985 a zine reader from Medan (North Sumatra) wrote: "As a *gay* who could be called a veteran [because of his age], I am very proud and touched by your efforts and creativity. In the life of *gay* people, whom almost all people think of as just interested in satisfaction and not to be taken seriously, you emerge bringing

a mission that is fundamental for the whole *gay* society (*masyarakat gay*). Through this media, we can open our eyes clearly" (*Jaka* 1985, 5:3). For *gay* Indonesians, prestasis are good deeds that set in motion a cycle of moral exchange whereby society, in repayment for the prestasis of *gay* Indonesians, will accept and receive (*terima*) them. Through prestasis, *gay* Indonesians express a desire to overcome separation and be reunited with the nation.

The Interzone: Cinta and Sexual Citizenship

In the first zone of desire, zines portray *gay* sexuality as moving on a continuum away from sex; its endpoint is a relational self formed through the discovery of, but separation from, love. In the second zone of desire, zines portray *gay* Indonesians as desiring national belonging—a trope of overcoming separation, a trope of recognition depending on prestasis. A crucial cultural logic animating *gay* zines—and, I would argue, *gay* subjectivities—emerges in the intersection of these two zones of desire, as illustrated by the lyrics to a song published in the zine *Jaka* in 1987:[18]

PGY Yogyakarta	The Yogyakarta *Gay* Brotherhood
Datang dengan cinta,	Comes with love,
Berjuang dan berupaya / demi hak sesama	Struggles and labors / for the sake of equal rights.
Dengan semboyannya, / gaya hidup ceria	With our slogan, / the style of a happy life,[19]
Giat berkarya	working energetically
demi negara dan nusa bangsa	for the state and island nation.
Ayo kawan semua / gulung lengan baju	Come all friends / roll up your sleeves
Mari bahu membahu / jangan ragu-ragu	Let us stand shoulder to shoulder / don't hesitate
Tunjukkan pada dunia / bahwa kita sedia	Show the world / that we are ready
Baktikan jiwa	Devote your soul
membangun bangsa Indonesia	to building the Indonesian people
(*Jaka* 1987, 14:3)	

My analysis of this intersection draws upon a key concern of this volume as a whole: "The intertextualities that refract the myriad meanings that media acquire as they become sites of 'intimate habitation' for subjects living in specific historical and cultural milieus" (Mankekar and Schein, this volume).

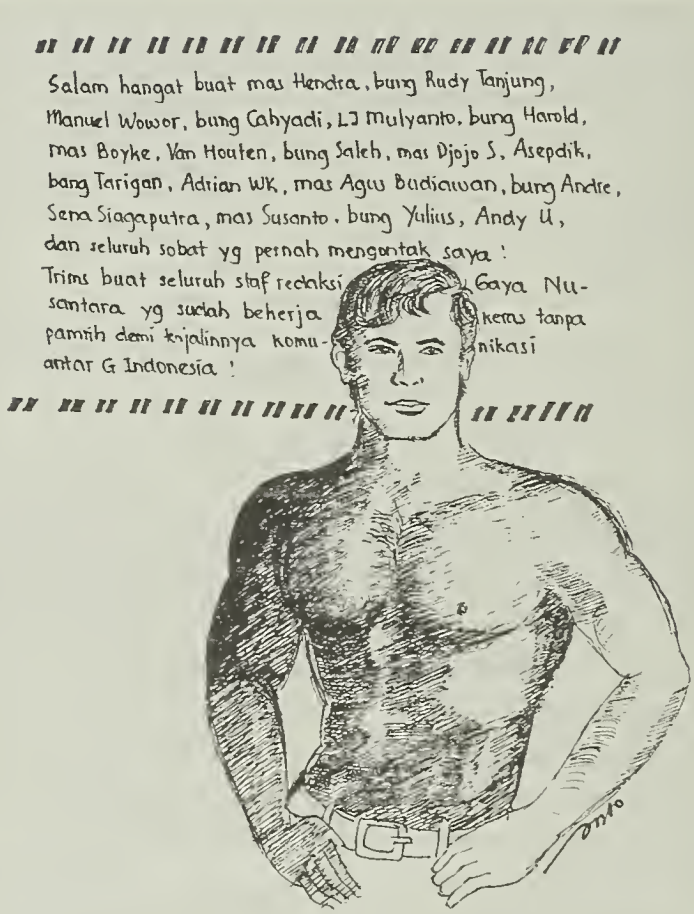
TABLE 3.2 Zines and Zones of Desire

	Desire for	Justified through	Unfulfilled desire construed as
First Zone	*gay* partner	*gay* love	separation from *gay* partner
Second Zone	national belonging	prestasi	nation withholds recognition
Interzone	*gay* national belonging	*gay* love as a prestasi	nation withholds love from the *gay* person

In this interzone, love itself emerges as the implicit prestasi qualifying *gay* Indonesians for sexual citizenship (see table 3.2). The paradox, and the source of the particular sting of exclusion and separation found in *gay* zines, is that *gay* love remains almost completely hidden from society. *Gay* love fails as a prestasi because the postcolonial nation rejects homosexuality; it will not act as an audience authorizing it. Recall the key position of love versus arranged marriages in debates over modernity in Indonesian literature. *Gay* Indonesians presume that heterosexual Indonesians are citizens by default; they may choose a spouse, but their relation to the nation is "arranged." *Gay* Indonesians, however, lack this relationship to the nation: the implication of the cultural logics of *gay* zines is that *gay* Indonesians must secure national belonging through active choice. Choosing the nation as the object of *gay* love stands as the prestasi that could, in theory, lead the nation to end its disavowal (see figure 3.11). But *gay* desire for national belonging fails to overcome separation: it is a sick love.

Zines thus present love as the ultimate prestasi, proving *gay* Indonesians are equivalent to *normal* Indonesians (see figure 3.12). The publishers of *Jaka* once noted, "Our differences with *hetero* people don't need to be blown out of proportion. In fact, if we respect each other we can stand shoulder to shoulder and build this beloved nation and people. . . . As a minority that's 'put down,' we have to show that our patriotism and nationalism doesn't fail to compare!" (*Jaka* 1988, 17:2). An article sent to *GAYa Nusantara*, "Between Love and Lust," uses the trope of betweenness to set forth love as a prestasi:

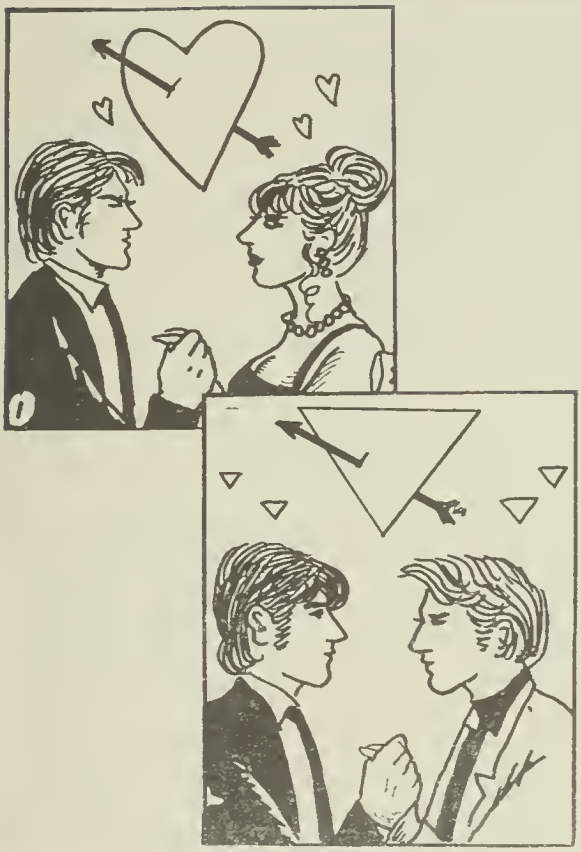
> The lives of *gay* people are scrutinized and marginalized by *hetero* people, above all in regards to love. They accuse *gay* people of not having feelings of love, but only lust and desire. As one of many *gay* people in this country, I feel very apprehensive about this accusation. . . . [If *gay* men love each other,] we *gay* people


Salam hangat buat mas Hendra, bung Rudy Tanjung,
Manuel Wowor, bung Cahyadi, LJ Mulyanto, bung Harold,
mas Boyke, Van Houten, bung Saleh, mas Djojo S, Asepdik,
bang Tarigan, Adrian WK, mas Agus Budiawan, bung Andre,
Sena Siagaputra, mas Susanto, bung Yulius, Andy U,
dan seluruh sobat yg pernah mengontak saya!
Trims buat seluruh staf redaksi GAYa Nu-
santara yg sudah beherja kemis tanpa
pamrih demi kejalinnya komu- nikasi
antar G Indonesia!

3.11. The interzone: male beauty juxtaposed with greetings to pen pals from across the nation and thanks to the publishers of *GAYa Nusantara* for their *prestasi* of "working so hard without reward for communication between 'G' Indonesians!" (GN 1995, 36:7).

> will still be scrutinized, but the comments will change: "Wow, look at the example that *gay* couple is setting!" In that way, *hetero* people will slowly become impressed with the model of *gay* love. I have a friend who is *lesbi*, and who lives in peace, having built a household with her lover. They sail their prosperous ship of life and have even adopted a child. It's the same with a *gay* couple that work as lowly trash collectors. . . . Although they live in a simple home, their strong love shocks *hetero* people. . . . If *gay* people form lasting relationships, society itself will be taken aback and not reject us. . . . Let us hope that *gay* people are aware that we do not live only to fulfill our lusts, but that love is the ultimate thing. (GN 1989, 11:31–32)

Despite this optimism, separation haunts the interzone: *gay* zines voice a clear awareness that *gay* love for the nation is not reciprocated. This dynamic is illustrated by fantastical short stories, two examples of which are given below. In these parables, *gay* love magically produces the prestasi that should make it worthy of recognition, but these prestasis lead to separa-



3.12. Love makes *gay* Indonesians equivalent to *normal* ones (*GN* 1999, 59:36).

tion—dooming the love to a nonsexual plane and exiling the beloved from the nation.

In one such story by a *GAYa Nusantara* reader from Jakarta, the married protagonist works as a geologist at a remote oil field in Sumatra. Soon after his unhappy wife leaves for Java, he meets a handsome young man, Nana, along the road near a forest. Nana follows the geologist to the oil-field camp, where he sits next to the geologist as the geologist ponders a map. The geologist observes, "Nana, watching over my shoulder, with a smile said that from this place to this place there would certainly be oil. When I asked him how he knew he only smiled." They become lovers and Nana's test wells are rich in oil. The boss is elated with this prestasi, for which the geologist takes credit. Nana continues to find oil on behalf of his beloved geologist and even heals the boss's fever. Eventually the boss gives the geologist a promotion to Jakarta, but Nana is silent. "When I asked if it was because I had a wife in Java, he said no. . . . Finally he just said that he wanted to return to the area where I first found him." Nana disappears into the forest. Suddenly an old, gray civet cat approaches the geologist. The cat kisses his feet, "strangely,

appears to be crying," and then leaves. The geologist then sees an old man who says the forest is inhabited only by a 230-year-old civet cat that can take human form. The geologist laments, "Now I live alone, my wife left me because I didn't pay attention to her. . . . Oh Nana, I love you so much" (*GN* 1996, 44:17–21).

In another story by a reader from the city of Solo, the protagonist, Calvin, falls in love with a fellow college student, Harold. One day Calvin sees a brilliantly written thesis with the same title as his own in Harold's room. There is a note: "I will leave after I find what I'm looking for." Harold explains he has been expelled for having sex with a professor and Calvin can use his thesis. That night they have sex; the next morning Harold is gone. When Calvin finds Harold's grandmother and asks where Harold might be, the shocked woman replies that Harold died a year previously, "before he could graduate." She recalls, "He was disappointed with his schooling and killed himself. He left a message that he would leave if he found what he was looking for, but I didn't understand. Maybe you are what he was looking for. I beg of you, stay here with me, so that Harold can be at peace" (*GN* 2000, 74:35–36).

In these stories, fantastical *gay* men perform prestasis for their beloved, bringing them success in national society, but the love-recognition that should ensue does not come to pass. Both end in separation. Even short stories without fantastic elements often present this same dynamic, as in "A Red Orchid for Kresna," sent to *GAYa Nusantara* by a *gay* man from Purworejo. In this story, Kresna is the childhood friend of Har, the protagonist, but as they get older, Har's feelings get stronger: "What is this feeling? Is it love? . . . Does that mean . . . I'm a *gay* person?" (*GN* 2001, 82:32). Eventually Kresna tells Har he reciprocates his love, but in fear Har runs away and marries a woman. This separation is set to end when Har, realizing he is *gay*, divorces his wife and returns to Yogyakarta to find Kresna.[20] He arrives at Kresna's house to find the family in an uproar: Kresna, whose parents rejected him after learning Kresna was *gay*, went to work at an orphanage and recently donated a kidney to a young orphan. The orphan was saved, but Kresna died from complications. Har, filled with the pain of separation, writes to Kresna in his diary: "I have found the true meaning of love. . . . Today, you are no longer a *gay* person who dies without honor, but a knight who has fallen in shining armor" (34).

Because *gay* zines bring together homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging under the sign of love-as-prestasi, it is only logical that *gay* zines themselves can be construed not only as prestasi but as something loved (see figure 3.13). Professions of love to zines have been frequent since

3.13. A figure in *GAYa Nusantara*, holding the zine in one hand and a sign reading "*gay* love" in the other (*GN* 1993, 21:30).

zines' beginnings, sometimes mixed with fears of separation: "I've fallen in love with *Jaka*; what's more, if I can get to know other lovers [*pencinta*] of *Jaka*, the feelings will be a million times greater" (*Jaka* 1986, 7:3); "It's like *Jaka* has become the heart of our people [*jantungnya kaum kita*]" (*Jaka* 1986, 8:2); "I fell in love with *Jaka* at first sight, and it grows deeper and deeper. I feel fearful and sad when I imagine *Jaka* disappearing" (*Jaka* 1986, 8:2; see also *GN* 2001, 81:47).

Zines sometimes even appear as agents of love. Toward the end of the story "A Million Lamps of the Heart," the author-protagonist, Ar, is in his last year of high school and has met another student, Budi. One day Budi invites Ar to his house while Budi's parents are still at work:

> In the bedroom, Budi straightaway took off his shirt and pants. Wearing nothing but his underwear, he opened a bookcase, took out a magazine [*majalah*] and gave it to me. I started to read the magazine; its black-and-white cover just had a

big G surrounded by *gaya hidup ceria* and the edition's number. Seeing me read the magazine, Budi smiled shyly and approached me.

"What about it, Ar?" . . .
"Sure, Budi," I replied. "Now?"
"Yes, now." Immediately I took off my clothes. . . . Suddenly we were kissing . . .

"If I'd just known before, Ar—" he said.
"What would you have done?" I interrupted.
"I would [have] done like this!"

And right away he moved on top of me. . . . Now I feel that I'm not alone anymore. Now I have a friend of the same world as me, in other words who also likes those of the same sex. Not just that. There is still something else. What? That magazine! Yes, that G bulletin. Now I feel that with the publication of that magazine I can get many friends who have the same feelings and joys as myself. Before I found that G, I felt my world was dark. Now that I've found that G I feel it's not so dark anymore. Now my world is bright and clear because a million lamps of the heart shine together. (G 1983, 5:7–9)

This zine-within-a-zine flags the interzone where homosexual desire and a desire for national belonging come together: the "million lamps of the heart" is the *gay* archipelago itself, the national network of *gay* men whose sexual desires find form through the prism of national discourse. The links between zines, love, and nation appear even more explicitly in the short story "Selingkuh," a term which means "dishonest" or "corrupt" in standard Indonesian but among *gay* men refers to having sex with a man other than one's boyfriend (I have never heard *gay* men refer to sex with a wife or girlfriend as *selingkuh*). In this story, Adam and Sam are lovers who each, unbeknownst to the other, take out a personal ad in *GAYa Nusantara*, the very zine in which the story appears, to find a new sex partner (GN 2001, 83:27–32). When Sam gets a reply he is excited:

Yess! Sekali lagi Sam bersorak-sorak bergembira, bergembira semua, sudah bebas negri kita, untuk s'lama-amanya. . . . Aduh, sampe keterusan nyanyi-nyanyi lagu perjuangan.	Yess! Once again Sam shouted with happiness, everything was happy, our nation is now free, for all time. . . . Oh my, to the point that I inadvertently sing a song of the struggle. (28–29)

When Sam's joy leads him to sing a song from the anticolonial struggle, he breaks character (as in the "million lamps of the heart" story above) to

address the zine reader directly. When Adam receives his reply and is preparing for his blind date, he showers and dresses himself "carefully and in the shortest possible time (like the proclamation) [*kayak proklamasi aja*]" (*GN* 3002, 83:29). "Proklamasi" refers to the famously short (two-sentence) declaration of independence read by Sukarno on August 17, 1945, Indonesia's Independence Day. These are ironic and joking references to the nation, but the joke's bite comes from their appearance in a zine that, like all zines, regularly contains writing that employs nationalist discourse. Of course, it turns out that Adam and Sam have unknowingly chosen each other's personal ads; when they learn this, they celebrate their renewed love with a night of raucous sex. This story's author is from Ponorogo, the region of Java where "traditional" homosexual relations between *waroks* (male dancers and mystical experts) and *gemblaks* (their younger male understudies) originated, yet there is no mention of this tradition; *gay* love and *gay* belonging are national matters.

In the interzone, then, homosexuality and national belonging come together under the sign of love. As zines are produced in the interstices of everyday life and read in stolen moments on a bed or in a friend's room, *gay* men imagine a new Indonesia. Through this national romance, they desire recognition from a nation-lover where now there is only separation. This is the story behind the story, so to speak, of *gay* zines. How might I leave the reader with an appreciation for the raw emotional sensibility of this implicit, unattainable interzone? It would be to construe Indonesia, the nation itself, as returning the gaze coming from the faces of *gay* men on zine covers. A nation that at long last turns to the *gay* Indonesian and looks you right in the eye, that accepts your prestasis and closes distance. An Indonesia that beckons you and in that impossible moment is consumed by homosexual desire. An Indonesia that gathers you, finally, into the warmest of embraces and whispers in your ear—"you are loved." And you are home.

Notes

Acknowledgments: Support for research in Indonesia has been provided by the Social Science Research Council, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Stanford University, the Morrison Institute for Population and Resource Studies, and the Center for the Teaching of Indonesian. Purnima Mankekar, Louisa Schein, and Ann Waltner provided detailed and extremely helpful readings of drafts of this chapter. I also thank Bill Maurer, Dédé Oetomo, Janice Rad-

way, and Patricia Spyer for their comments and support. A special thanks to all the Indonesians who have helped me collect *gay* and *lesbi* zines. Particular thanks go to Stephen Shirreffs for sharing his collection of the zine *Jaka*, and to Dédé Oetomo for helping me obtain issues of *G: Gaya Hidup Ceria*, *GN*, *K-79*, and *GAYa Betawi*. All italicized terms are Indonesian; all translations are my own.

1. This chapter is based on about two years of fieldwork in Indonesia, in 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997–98, and 2000, with brief visits in 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2007. Most of the zines discussed in this chapter were produced by *gay* men, but several were produced by *lesbi* women as well. I have strived to take into account the perspectives provided by these *lesbi* materials; see the Boellstorff (2007, chapter 2) study for a more extended discussion. The Internet was first mentioned in a *gay* zine in *GAYa Nusantara* (1996, no. 44). Since August 1999, a handful of zines have established Internet websites, as have some individual *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians. Since the impact of the Internet differs from that of zines, however, I do not discuss it in this chapter.

2. One letter to the editors of *Jaka* praised the zine because "the short stories happen to be almost exactly like my own experiences" (*Jaka* 1986, 8:2). In a *GAYa Nusantara* readers' survey conducted in 1996, true-experience stories were the favorite genre.

3. On five occasions, I have contributed articles to *GAYa Nusantara* (nos. 52, 53, 73, 77, and 78). I have also been interviewed by *GAYa Nusantara* on several occasions (nos. 23, 24, and 41).

4. *GAYa Nusantara*, the zine with the largest circulation, has had a print run of six hundred for most of its history (beginning in 1992 with no. 17), with a high of about eight hundred; by 2001 its circulation was down to about four hundred. *GAYa Nusantara* is also the only zine that has carried advertising of any consequence (usually for salons or drag events), and the only zine to have had any kind of public distribution. Beginning in the mid-1990s, *GAYa Nusantara* has been sold at a few bookstores in the city of Surabaya.

5. Letters to *gay* zines sometimes speak of being lent a zine by friends (*Jaka* 1986, 11:3; *Jaka* 1987, 13:3), or of obtaining photocopies of zines (*GN* 1988, 3:6; *GN* 1988, 5/6:2). Many *gay* Indonesians are unaware that *gay* zines exist, even if they live in a city where such a zine is published. The primary relationship between *gay* zines and regular mass media is that occasional coverage of *gay* zines in these media (or even more general news on homosexuality) can generate a flood of letters to the zines. The first such example was in May 1982, when the women's magazine *Sarinah* ran an article about *G: Gaya Hidup Ceria*, the first *gay* zine; as a result a number of *lesbi* women wrote to the zine, seeking contacts and asking to become members of the organization associated with the zine (*G* 1983, 6:3).

6. Letters to the editor indicate cases of persons who, for fear of discovery or the fact that they live in an area where they do not know any *lesbi* or *gay* persons, obtain a single copy of a zine, then subscribe to the zine and do not share the zines with others. In such cases, the act of subscribing to the zine does not reduce social networks; it simply fails to strengthen them or generate new ones.

7. In a twelfth-anniversary retrospective, the editors of *GN* noted that the term "nusan-

tara" "illustrates clearly that this group is national-scale [*berskala nasional*], meaning for the Indonesian *gay* people" (*GN* 1999, 62:23).

8. "Very often the first conflicts and disappointments [between parents and children who had been given a 'modern' education] centered around the choice of a wife. . . . In such communities marriage did not merely represent the union of boy and girl, but a further extension of all kinds of family relationships. . . . It is thus not altogether surprising that in the literature of the young Indonesian generation, which began to appear in this atmosphere of conflict between modern and traditional Indonesian culture, the conflict, in all its aspects, was a major theme" (Alisjahbana 1966, 30–31).

9. Heteronormativity, of course, has been a key element of nationalist discourse since its beginnings (Eder, Hall, and Hekma 1999; L. Liu 1999; Mosse 1985) and has played a role in debates over definitions of proper citizenship in Euroamerica (Beriss 1996; Berlant 1997; Duggan and Hunter 1995; Parker et al. 1992; Warner 1993). In contemporary postcolonial societies, debates over national belonging can take forms that incorporate, in various ways, these European origins of heteronormative nationalist ideology (Heng and Devan 1995; Lumsden 1996; Mankekar 1999; Murray 1996; Parker 1999; Schein 1996).

10. Although homosexuality is increasingly a topic of discussion in mainstream Indonesian mass media, such coverage is overwhelmingly negative and the few textual or imagic representations of homosexual desire are usually of Euroamericans.

11. The only context in which sex consistently appears in *gay* zines is in articles on preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Such articles are fairly common in *gay* zines (and rare in *lesbi* zines) because many are funded directly or indirectly through HIV-prevention programs, provided in most cases by international development agencies.

12. For other narratives of separation, see *NJJ* 1997, 2:17–21; *GN* 1988, 2:13–21; *GN* 1997, 49:23–28.

13. The only language other than Indonesian that ever appears in *gay* and *lesbi* zines is English. Short stories and personals ads sometimes contain English words or short phrases. *GN* ran a one-page "Summary in English" from 1994 to 1997 (nos. 25–47), and *lesbi* zines have occasionally included entire articles in English (reflecting the high educational status of most of their producers). *GB* noted that some of the *lesbi* articles to be included within its pages would be in English so that it could conceivably reach readers at the "international level" (*GB* 6:7).

14. The only case of ethnicity's entering narrative in a *gay* zine to date, to my knowledge, is in the "true-experiences" story of Alfred, a student from Irian Jaya (the western half of the island of New Guinea). Alfred feels cursed because of his dark "Negroid" skin and believes that a Javanese student (in the city of Jayapura, on the north coast) is staring at him, rejecting him for his ethnicity. In good national-culture form, however, it turns out that the Javanese student is desirous of Alfred, and they begin a sexual relationship (*GN* 1994, 25:22–23).

15. The first of these "customs of the Archipelago" columns, examining male homosexuality in Aceh, appeared in *GN* (1989, 11:15–18). The only case where there is cross-

over between these sexualities and *gay* subjectivity in zines is a true-experiences story in which a *gemblak* (male understudy actor in East Java) begins to live as a *gay* man (*GN* 2000, 69:37–41).

16. This discrepancy may be due to Indonesian women's greater familiarity with domestic violence. Many *gay* men and *lesbi* women have seen either gay pornography, or straight pornography in which "lesbian" sex is presented, and these images (viewed firsthand or described by friends) shape the sense of Euroamerica as a place of untrammeled sexuality.

17. My thanks to Leena Avonius for reminding me of this point.

18. Persaudaraan Gay Yogyakarta was the first formalized *gay* group in the city of Yogyakarta (Java) and publisher of *Jaka*.

19. *Gaya Hidup Ceria* is the name of the first *gay* zine and can be taken to mean "happy gay life."

20. In other words, Har does not appear to believe that he can be *gay* and married to a woman at the same time. As noted previously, such attitudes, while present among *gay* men for years, are still the minority view (see Boellstorff 1999, 2005).

CORRESPONDENCE MARRIAGES, IMAGINED VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES, AND COUNTEREROTICS ON THE INTERNET

The love that the men have for their ladies is truly amazing. I love my wife and she is not a sex slave or my maid at all and there is a chance we may decide to live in the Philippines. Yes there are cases where there has been abuse or prostitution involved but this is rare. . . . One thing for sure I love my wife very much we only have a 15 year age difference and this makes it easier.

—NATHAN WATTS, ABS-CBN NEWS, POSTED JUNE 10, 2000

Much of the U.S. popular media (television, Internet, and print journalism) highlights sensational and erotic aspects of international correspondence marriages. It stresses, for example, the trafficking or victimization of women from impoverished regions of the world; men's physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive acts; and the "buying" or "selling" of women. A significant body of scholarly literature also provides analysis and critique of so-called mail-order bride catalogues, marriages, and the wider profit-oriented international marriage industry.[1] Such literature often points to the historically constituted, military, colonial, and neo-colonial bases for racialized, sexualized, eroticized, and exoticized images of "Asian" women, and to the power imbalances between Western men and foreign women. It identifies important U.S. and Australian historical legacies of race and sexuality in relation to Asia, and in relation to Western fantasies about Asian women.

Most academic studies of so-called mail-order brides are based exclusively on textual and discursive readings of catalogues, not on ethnographic,

Internet, or face-to-face interactions with the men and women involved. As such, they focus largely on images, sexual stereotypes, and implicit or explicit erotic desires, overlooking the ways that women and men pursue, realize, and negotiate such relationships and their own discursive representations. Rarely do such studies consider the everyday experiences of such couples or the less erotic desires that motivate men to look for foreign wives, whom they believe will make better or more suitable partners than Western women.

Ara Wilson's work is a notable exception to the overemphasis on eroticism in analyses of introduction catalogues. She has observed that "representations in the catalogues are not sensuously alluring or romantically enigmatic" (1988, 121); that women's photographs often resemble yearbook or passport photographs (117); and that "when references to the erotic aspects of Asian women appear, they seem almost an afterthought" (121). However, much of the popular and scholarly literature on Asian mail-order brides can be faulted for inadvertently reproducing the facile images of erotic, exotic, victimized, essentialized, and homogenized Asian women that they aim to criticize, and for failing to consider the "stutterings . . . and silences surrounding erotics" referred to by Schein and Mankekar in the introduction to this volume.

The Western characterization of Asian women as erotic, exotic, and sexually available (often paired with the idea that they are poor and desperate) is widespread in scholarship on mail-order brides, and on the Internet. As Vernadette Gonzalez and Robyn Rodriguez argue, the Internet has reinforced the links of "*Filipina* to *sex*, *mail-order bride*, or *domestic*" (2003, 223). Whereas common stereotypes of Asian women's subservience and sexual availability no doubt feed into Western desires and fantasies about Asian women, as is perhaps best exemplified in sex tourism, popular stereotypes of sexy and available Asian women do not easily or comfortably coexist alongside other popular stereotypes of Asian women as ideal, faithful, loving, devoted, and desirable wives with old-fashioned, traditional family values (Constable 2003; Wilson 1988). Given popular conflations of maids, brides, and prostitutes, men who look for wives in the Philippines and other parts of Asia must contend with the potential tensions between real or imagined erotic desires and their desire to meet a "good" and "traditional" Asian wife. By defending their countererotic motives, they represent themselves online in marked contrast to Western sex tourists who openly brag online about their sexual exploits and erotic adventures (Bishop and Robinson 2002).

As the epigraph to this chapter demonstrates (originally posted as part of an Internet newsgroup discussion), men in search of Asian brides are often actively invested in distancing themselves from sex tourists and in discursively countering more explicitly erotic images of their foreign brides as sex slaves or prostitutes who are motivated by greed or opportunism, and who are viewed as morally questionable. This is not to say that stereotypes of Asian domesticity, innocence, and sexual purity are not or cannot be eroticized (Angeles and Sunanta 2007; Wilson 1988). Yet among the men I encountered from the United States, sexual experience and sexual availability were understood to pose a volatile threat to their less explicitly erotic desires for love, family values, fidelity, and lasting marriages. Ironically, these men's countererotic objectives share something in common with those of Kristina Wong, a feminist web activist who has set up a "mock mail-order bride website" (http://www.bigbadchinesemama.com) to subvert and criticize the image of mail-order brides and the wider commodification of Asian women.

The images on Wong's website are grotesque and carnivalesque depictions of Asian women that challenge and unsettle stereotypical images of sweet or sexy Asian femininity. Sections of the website are titled "Memoirs of an Anti-Geisha," "Madame Bootiefly," and "The Harem of Angst," and the text and images highlight the ugly, the bizarre, and the absurd. Chris Hudson convincingly argues that Wong's website is an example of cyber-feminist subversion: it "diminish[es] the authority of the orthodox narrative by intentionally de-eroticizing and de-essentializing Asian women" (Hudson 2007) and produces "oppositional consciousness" (Sandoval 2000).

The men described in this chapter clearly have a very different agenda than Wong and the contributors to her website. Their discursive styles differ radically from Wong's and they can, of course, hardly be described as subversive cyber-feminists. Yet both actively participate in the politics of representation online and, perhaps surprisingly, share some of the same countererotic objectives. The men have created—and actively police—an online community that serves as an arena in which to deconstruct prevailing erotic stereotypes of mail-order brides. Their strategies clearly draw on and reproduce certain aspects of conventional stereotypes of Asian women that coincide with their notions of good wives, but they are nonetheless highly critical of erotic stereotypes and they actively promote countererotic self-definitions of the sorts of men and the sorts of women who seek to meet marriage partners through correspondence.

Elsewhere I have written about the online and offline community of U.S.

men, Filipinas, and Chinese women who seek foreign marriage partners (Constable 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007). The Internet dimension of my wider research involved several different but overlapping translocal and multisited dimensions: research on and among Internet introduction agencies, Internet correspondence (as a researcher) with women who sought online partners, research in or around Internet cafés in China and the Philippines, research on private groups or listservs that I joined as a researcher-member, and research on public online news-discussion groups. Each Internet-related aspect of my research revealed different facets of a wider virtual network that includes men and women involved in intercultural relationships, as well as many other interested persons. As a participant of sorts in this wider virtual, discursive network, and as an "itinerant ethnographer" (Schein 2002, 231), I observed multiple ways boundaries between the local, national, and the global are challenged, resulting in a discursive community that at once "feels" local but is in fact highly global. This virtual network or imagined community of sorts has shaped and facilitated the circulation of transnational desires, revealing qualitative changes in the ways that cross-border marriages are imagined, realized, and argued about.

In this chapter, I limit my focus to Internet spaces that predominated in the 1990s and early 2000s and still exist today. Those more "static web pages and message forums" are retrospectively dubbed "Web 1.0," in contrast to the newer, more interactive, more media-intensive "wikis, blogs, and embedded videos" of the post-2004 "Web 2.0" era, with its greater user interface (E. G. Coleman 2010, 489). Within such spaces, I consider how Western men debated, contested, and reproduced notions of erotics in relation to "Asian women." I ask what the virtual communities of men and the electronic trails and texts they produced reveal about the erotics—or more accurately the countererotics—of correspondence marriages. Whereas sexuality and eroticism are common underlying themes and underlying sources of tension among men who seek foreign brides, countererotics refers to the ways men and the virtual communities to which they belong attempt to disavow and distance themselves from the erotic and from the vilified images of the "sorts of men" who are said to seek mail-order brides.

Sites of male participation in homosocial communities attempt to counter the explicitly eroticized and sensationalized images of mail-order marriages. These sites display mainly men's voices. In these contexts, as on the Internet sites advertising brides and domestic workers examined by Gonzalez and Rodriguez (2003), women are generally spoken about but they are rarely active participants.

Imagined Virtual Communities

As observed in the introduction to this volume, monumental changes have taken place in the scale and reach of transnational media over the course of the past three decades (E. G. Coleman 2010). By the 1990s, the phenomenal growth in Internet media created massive opportunities for growth in the business of correspondence marriages. Pen pals and correspondence marriages are, of course, not new. European women who married men on the Western frontier of the United States during the nineteenth century, and Japanese and Korean "picture brides" who immigrated to the United States in the early twentieth century to marry Japanese and Korean immigrant men are cases in point. But there is something qualitatively different about how the Internet has turned correspondence into more than a method of introduction or a business and into a "community" of sorts, in a larger sense.

In his watershed study of the rise of nationalism, Benedict Anderson argued that print media played a key role in creating the imagined community of the nation among individuals who would never meet face-to-face and whose identities and interests otherwise varied greatly (1983). More recently Arjun Appadurai observed that the Internet serves as a resource to create new "imagined selves and imagined worlds" (1996, 3). He notes that these imaginaries are neither "purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined," yet they have the potential to create "communities of sentiment" that are transnational and can "operate beyond the boundaries of the nation" (1996, 4, 8). The development of the Internet has allowed for the emergence of new types of imagined communities of sentiment, including new, transnational marriage-scapes and discursive networks or communities of men involved in or concerned about correspondence courtship and marriage. One major concern of these men—one shared sentiment—is how to respond to the prevailing negative views about those who engage in mail-order marriages.

The Internet serves as far more than just a tool for introduction and correspondence between individual men and women. Clusters of people who interact by way of the Internet constitute new sorts of global and virtual networks that overlap and intertwine with those that are more face-to-face, or more territorialized. Like global ethnoscapes, online virtual communities can be seen as networks or as "landscapes of group activity." As such, they are "no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous" (Appadurai 1996, 48).[2]

The Internet has spawned new opportunities for researchers. For ethnog-

raphers, it yields novel routes of entry into research sites and unique ways of combining online ethnography with more conventional research in the offline, so-called real world—facilitating new "ethnotextual" approaches (Mankekar and Schein, this volume). The Internet leaves behind textual trails and remnants that can be archived and excavated. It served as a key point of entry from which I conducted research among the online and offline community of U.S. men and Filipinas who sought marriage partners through correspondence. In the wider project I utilized the Internet to introduce myself as a researcher to women in China and the Philippines who sought foreign marriage partners. I then followed the pattern of many U.S.-Asian couples and met my pen pals face-to-face abroad.[3] Through the women, men, and couples I met online and offline, I gained access to some of the more mundane and less-explored dimensions of correspondence courtship and marriage. Men and women introduced me to Internet spaces in which the meanings of correspondence relationships—in relation to erotics and wholesome family values—are debated, negotiated, renegotiated, and counteracted, or at least complicated in light of the more negative popular views of men as, for example, losers and control freaks who "buy" wives as maids and sex slaves, and the women as desperately willing to "sell themselves" or to accept the role of maid and sexual fantasy for the sake of emigrating. Internet spaces are thus ideal locations in which to examine "cultural struggles that suffuse texts, the politics of the popular and the public, and the everyday lives of men and women" (Mankekar and Schein, this volume).

Introduction Agencies

Through ever-expanding numbers of introduction websites and online catalogues, Internet websites fuel the desire and opportunity to meet an ideal mate in far-flung regions of the globe. They offer growing numbers of men and women from different regions new and wider opportunities to meet, correspond, and sometimes marry. Yet these opportunities are not egalitarian or free for all, but usually fit into a wider pattern of global hypergamy (Constable 2005a). Opportunities for men from wealthier regions of the West to meet women from many regions of the so-called Third World have increased and follow a particular gendered, cultural logic. The opportunities are clearly marked by what Doreen Massey calls "power geometries," in which some people "initiate flows and movement, [whereas] others don't" (1994, 149), and by what Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler call "gendered geographies of power" (2001, 6), pointing to the ways gender and social loca-

tion are tied to geographic mobility. Such patterns are also fueled by globally circulating images and fantasies of ideal marriage partners, particularly those in which Asian women are considered (as in Schein's chapter) less corrupted by Westernization.

Since the 1980s, patterns of international correspondence courtship and marriage have broadened greatly in scope. Filipino-Australian marriages are among the best-known examples, but other recent marriage flows have included Filipinas who have married men from rural Japan and from northern and western Europe and North America, and women from China and Southeast Asia who have married men in Taiwan and South Korea.[4] Although printed catalogues still circulate by postal service in the United States, the business of marriage introductions rapidly expanded in the 1990s with the rise of Internet-based agencies that more efficiently and discreetly introduced English-speaking men to women from Asia, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Latin America. Women listed on such Internet websites come from all parts of Asia, but as of the late 1990s most Asian women were from the Philippines.[5]

There exist many different types of introduction services. On one extreme are those geared explicitly toward men and women who hope to meet "life partners" or "marriage partners," whereas others are aimed at dating, escort, and sexual services. The latter explicitly offer sexual adventures and eroticism. By contrast, marriage-oriented services are very tame, yet like other profit-oriented online businesses, they share the goal of promoting certain fantasies. My research focused on "marriage-oriented" agencies or those aimed at heterosexual men from the United States who seek "life partners." Many such agencies are listed on www.goodwife.com, a website that promotes itself as a "Mail Order Bride Warehouse," with links to agencies that introduce North American men to foreign women. As of August 2000, I counted 350 international introduction services listed on goodwife.com, up from 202 in 1999 (Scholes 1999). Under the category "Asian," the number had increased from fifty-five in May 1998 to eighty-nine in August 2000. The "Soviet" category had increased from 105 in May 1998 to 164 in August 2000. Goodwife.com did not include many free pen pal clubs, nor did it include individually run personal websites that offer introductions at no cost, thus 350 agencies is a conservative estimate (Constable 2005b).

I examined numerous online agencies, including kiss.com, Oceanbridge, and China Bride. Listings were available to anyone who logged on to the site. Most allowed nonmembers access to photographs of women (and sometimes of men) and to women's autobiographical statements. This material

typically included a woman's name, age, occupation, education, religion, height and weight, marital status, and a few comments about her interests or hobbies. Given that much of the existing research on mail-order brides stresses sexual stereotypes and Western fantasies about Asian women, I was surprised to see that the vast majority of the visual images and bodily poses of Filipinas and Chinese women at the time were very modest and that the women's own statements were remarkably nonsuggestive.[6]

The website for Asian Brides Online is fairly typical of marriage-oriented websites that advertise listings of women from all parts of Asia. Its home page announces:

> Don't settle for anything less! If you're looking for a lifetime companion, a best friend and faithful lover, you've come to the right place! Don't get distracted by other "Romance" companies. Choose the Premier international introduction and tour company! Asian Brides Online! We are dedicated to introducing foreign women to loving, stable men who desire wives! You've seen the rest—now choose the BEST! . . .
>
> We have selected over 20,000 beautiful, sincere women, from all walks of life, as potential mates for our male clients. We have more than 70,000 photos, and add new applicants weekly. We invite you to browse through our online catalog at the variety of ladies that have at least one thing in common—they want husbands! (http://www.asianbridesonline.com, accessed October 20, 2006)

Noteworthy about this website and many others that aim to introduce U.S. men to Asian (and other foreign) women is their apparent lack of explicit eroticism. Although at the time of this research the website included a few photographs of women's faces that appeared to be overtly provocative or flirtatious, and although clearly pretty women had been chosen for the home page, most women were nonetheless strikingly demure and the photographs were more reminiscent of passport or yearbook photographs than of more seductive images of women in popular media. The text, moreover, was fairly typical in its emphasis on lifetime companions, faithful women, and sincerity. Many similar marriage-oriented websites—unlike those that are aimed purely at dating, escort services, or sexual services—seem to at once promote an image of Asian women as faithful and sincere, and yet to explicitly or implicitly contrast them to other types of women. On the Asian Brides Online website, the potential "distraction" from "Romance companies" alludes to the possibility of encountering the "wrong sort of woman." This wrong sort of woman is never far from the surface of discussions of foreign brides. The source of her corruption is usually left implicit (as in this

case), but in other cases is explicitly linked to her Westernization, her loss of "traditional values," her greed, or her loss of sexual innocence.

The general statements on the introduction-agency websites I examined were rarely sexually explicit. They often harped on overall beauty or physical attractiveness and the ideal wifely qualities of foreign women, often contrasting them to assertive and spoiled Western feminists and gold diggers. The erotic appeal of such women is typically left implicit—or in the eye of the beholder. One exception was on websites that focused specifically on Filipinas. Some such sites noted the cultural importance of virginity before marriage in the Philippines. These discourses may be referred to as countererotic, even as they may suggest erotic subtexts, as in the allure of the virginal.

Private Listservs

Online catalogues are not something entirely new. In many ways they are an updated version of older print catalogues via a new media technology. Yet the Internet allows for much easier access to introductions between prospective spouses, and it also offers new ways for men and women to correspond more quickly and efficiently than through the older method of letters and postal services. Listservs and newsgroups, which offer truly new forms of sociality and new venues for circulating, perpetuating, and also challenging and debating assumptions about "Asian women" and "Western men" who partake in such processes of introduction and courtship, have received far less scholarly attention than matchmaking or introduction agencies.

In striking contrast to earlier decades, since the 1990s the Internet has allowed for the formation of men's online discussion groups that can be seen as virtual communities of sorts. These groups are often private listservs and chat groups for members only. Members apply to join, are vetted by moderators, and can be rejected or later banned or prohibited from participating in the group if they break the rules. The discussions and the texts that such listservs produce are thus usually circulated to a delineated group of members. Their members share many of the same views about correspondence courtship and marriage, and they circulate such positive or corrective views internally, in many cases "preaching to the choir," defending the community boundaries, and openly criticizing negative depictions of their relationships and defending their marital motives. Although the views expressed on listservs are limited in circulation, the perspectives expressed are still significant, and they often cross numerous spatial and social divides.

With good reason, men from the United States are often highly wary

and critical of negative, sensational, and titillating media portrayals of mail-order marriages. As a result, many refuse to speak to researchers or journalists and advise their wives or fiancées to do the same. Most couples prefer to live their lives in private, not under the critical eye of those who portray them as social rejects who have failed in the marriage market in the United States, as a result of physical or emotional shortcomings. They resist serving as fodder to fuel media images of men who are said to "buy" beautiful Asian women to fulfill their sexual fantasies and double as a maid and wife, or portrayals of young, beautiful, and sexy foreign women who are cast as either naive and innocent victims or as immoral predators who are out to seduce gullible men for the sake of money or a green card.

Given the difficulty of identifying and meeting couples in the United States, I depended partly on personal networks. Ben, a law professor who met his Filipina fiancée through correspondence, introduced me to other Filipino-American couples, told me about others, and described Filipino-American Family (FAF), the Internet list to which he belonged.[7] He urged me to join FAF, which at the time (1999) had over four hundred members—mostly men who were engaged, married, or intended to become involved with Filipinas. Some men had met their partners in the United States, or while traveling abroad, but most had met or carried out much of their courtship through correspondence. Although most had met their partners through introduction agencies (and willingly recommended those they considered reputable), members of this Internet group saw themselves as an extended family and a close-knit community. This online support group of sorts shared advice and information about agencies and the process of getting to know someone at a distance, but their common tie revolved around their experiences with Filipino partners, and the trials and tribulations of the process of immigration to the United States. Concerned about the stigma associated with mail-order marriages, they did not define themselves in terms of how they met their partners, but on the basis of being part of an intercultural couple. Their self-definitions were clearly intended to contrast with and to diffuse externally imposed notions of mail-order brides and marriages.

The members and moderators of FAF, like the other marriage-oriented lists I joined over the next two years, made a point of policing, censuring, criticizing, and occasionally censoring or excommunicating the occasional men who joined the list and expressed "inappropriate" viewpoints or blatant sexual fantasies about "Asian women," or those who did not seem sincere in their desire to find a marriage partner. The moderator of one list, for ex-

ample, directed me to a website he described as "the worst" pen pal business on the Internet. He and other members of the list—perhaps partly for my benefit—expressed shock and outrage that Filipinas were represented in such highly sexualized and objectified terms, and were even more appalled to learn that the owner of the site was a U.S.-based Filipina. Several months later, the same moderator banned a member because he discovered a link to "sex tours" on the man's private web page. Another man was banned because he came across as too much of a "control freak" in relation to his fiancée. Men sometimes also used the list as a place to meet, question, and carefully scrutinize the motives of prospective suitors for women in the Philippines who were friends, townmates, or relatives of their own girlfriend or wife. Men offered other men advice on finding women from small towns, and on how to avoid or identify women who had lived or worked near military bases, lest such women have lax morals or be hiding a history of sex work. In a variety of ways, Internet groups oppose and actively counteract negative constructions of the "sorts of men" and the "sorts of women" who seek partners through correspondence.

In the Philippines in 1999, I witnessed firsthand how men who belonged to FAF and other groups maintained contact. I observed as Ben and his friend Ted, one of the moderators of FAF who was visiting his fiancée as well, talked for hours about couples they had read about and whose photographs they had seen on FAF, and about the importance and value of this community. Ted regularly logged on to FAF from his Manila hotel room, and Ben made a point of visiting an Internet café each day to sift through the messages that had accumulated in the last twenty-four hours. Messages included those sent by men who were visiting pen pals and fiancées abroad. They shared success stories ("she has her visa, we'll be home next week!"), frustrations ("the INS turned down the visa"), requests for last-minute advice ("where do we get the police clearance?"), and suggestions ("the cheapest calling card is . . ."). Couples belonging to FAF whose visits overlapped made a point of getting together. These men provided each other with reassurance about the "honorable" and "marriage oriented" purposes of such visits, since couples quickly became aware that the vast majority of visible interracial couples in Manila (mainly white men and Filipinas) had met, or were commonly assumed to have met, through sex tourism and the sex-entertainment industry. Some men avoided patronizing bars and nightclubs that were associated with sex tourism (especially with a girlfriend, wife, or fiancée), thereby attempting to distance themselves from what they considered more singularly and overtly commodified sexual relationships. Couples

belonging to FAF distinguished themselves from other types of couples in other ways as well. Some slept in separate hotel rooms, others were accompanied by women's family members and friends who served as chaperones, and some simply vowed that they were "saving themselves" for after marriage. Others slept together but justified it on the basis of their proclaimed steadfast marital commitment.

When I met them in Manila, Ben and Ted spoke at length about FAF, and Ben encouraged me to join. I read all the public, unrestricted material on the FAF web pages. This included detailed information about visas, the immigration process, immigration interviews, agencies, Manila hotels, and even a public chat, or bulletin board, on which nonmembers could post questions and answers. The site included two private lists for members only. The main list included mostly men (and a few women who had Filipino husbands or fiancés), and the second was explicitly for "women only," and its members included Filipina partners of men from the wider list. I wrote to the moderators of both lists, explaining who I was, the nature of my research, and submitted a request to join. I mentioned Ben and Ted's names, suggesting that they might vouch for me, if necessary. I never received a response from the women's list, but a few hours after submitting my message to the FAF "men's" list, I received a message from one of the moderators allowing me to join.[8] The moderators suggested that I lurk briefly then introduce myself. They did not want to be accused of admitting a researcher without the members' knowledge. The moderators warned me that some members had had "bad experiences," and that I might be flamed.

For less than two days I "lurked" (or observed) as the list members exchanged over a hundred messages a day. Then I introduced myself. Within just a few hours, a number of members responded, and I became the latest hot topic. There were three main responses to my presence: friendly, challenging, and hostile. Most were friendly at first. Members welcomed me as they do all new members and encouraged me to participate. Some expressed enthusiasm and said they hoped I would help to represent the lesser-known "positive" side of the picture and help to set the record straight about them and their relationships. These were by far the most common responses to my introduction.

Some responses were more challenging but not hostile. Members explicitly called on me to explain and defend my research goals and methods. Two men cited their own research in a university hospital and asked why I was studying their group. They asked what I hoped to "prove." They asked about my credentials and research design, why I chose a qualitative

approach, whether I had obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study of human subjects, and whether I had read the latest Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) report on the topic.[9] Defending my research to these educated locals was more of a challenge than any defense or peer-review process I have experienced. From their perspective, allowing me to simply "observe" and design my research in response to what I learned was not reassuring. They wanted to know exactly what I was looking for and how it would be used.

When I checked my e-mail a few hours later, there were many more messages, including several that were far more hostile. These came from four members, two of whom were especially angry. One compared my presence on the list to having a stranger enter his home who listens to his private conversations and makes him feel defensive. The moderators, he said, had betrayed "the family"—a popular metaphor for this exclusive online community. They had allowed a stranger who, by virtue of being a Western, woman researcher, was assumed to be hostile or unsympathetic to their relationships, to enter their safe domain. One man objected to being treated like a "lab rat," regardless of my reassurances. These four critics said that they would not participate in any discussions while I was there, and they warned others of the danger of a researcher who would observe their interactions, twist their words, and use whatever they said against them. Others accused the critics of paranoia, asking what they had to hide, noting possible positive outcomes of such research, and noting that researchers might already be on the list but not have been so honest as to say so. Several pointed out that I was not an "unknown stranger," since Ben and Ted had met me in person. Others debated whether the information on the list was in fact "public" and whether my assurances to "do everything possible to protect their identity" (use pseudonyms, avoid identifiers, and acquire permission to quote them) were enough. My use of the phrase "everything possible," one man wrote, gave him greater cause for concern than anything said thus far. Members debated whether there was anything "bad" or "harmful" on the list that could be used against them. One man who argued that there was "nothing bad" and that the list had nothing to hide was harshly chastised for his naiveté. How could he not know, the critic wrote, that anything could be used out of context to make them look bad? Ted responded that he had met me and that ultimately it came down to trust. He recommended that others read my book about Filipina domestic workers and judge me on that basis. Another wrote that the moderators had decided to trust me, and I should therefore be given a chance.

The four outspoken critics advocated strict boundary maintenance in their community and remained adamantly opposed to my presence. They intensified their attempts to protect their "family" from the threat I posed as an outsider, a researcher, and a Western woman. Two sent me private messages demanding that I leave. Finally, I announced my decision to unsubscribe. For the better part of forty-eight hours my research and I had become the main topic of discussion and hundreds of e-mail messages on the topic were exchanged. As I explained in my final message, I respected the position of those who preferred not to be studied. I had never knowingly forced myself on research subjects before and had no intention to do so now. I did not want it to come down to "either she goes or I go." According to men on the list, the topic dominated the discussion long after and created some sharp divisions and conflicts among member of this community.

After I sent my final message, I received hundreds of e-mail messages from men who said they were sorry I had left. Many said that they understood and respected my decision, and that I "had no choice." Many expressed shame or regret that I had been so bitterly flamed by a vocal minority. Others thought I did the right thing, but apologized for the flaming. Many offered to help with my research, and about thirty men sent me brief narratives that described their experiences meeting, courting, and marrying Filipinas. Many of these men became founding members of the U.S.-Filipino Group (UFG), an offshoot of FAF with about forty members in late 2000. Daniel, the moderator of the UFG, started that list with the explicit purpose of helping me with my research. By 2001 the UFG had grown to include over two hundred members, with several active women members, including fiancées in the Philippines, Filipina wives, and Filipinas who were involved with U.S. pen pals.[10] The critical opinions about my presence demonstrate the importance of verbal exchange in the policing and maintenance of community boundaries. My leaving (or expulsion from) the group, as well as the various shifts in membership and the development of new offshoot groups, illustrates the fluid and shifting nature of these communities and the key role of discourse in their making and unmaking.

A Countererotic Narrative

Whereas those who opposed my presence on FAF aimed to protect their community and their reputations, fearing bad press from a researcher, those who welcomed me were likely motivated by the view that I could help to promote more positive views of their motives and their relationships. In contrast to FAF, the members of the UFG explicitly welcomed my presence.

Although posts to the list were varied, many men showed little hesitation about sharing their stories. Bruce lurked for several months then posted his story. I cite Bruce at length below to convey what is a fairly typical tone. His experience is unique yet also familiar, in that it tells a "love story" that resists the more stereotypical narrative of exploitation or eroticized and exoticized mail-order brides:

> Hello List,
> My name is Bruce and I have been a member of the list from the beginning. It has been a long time since I posted my introduction and I never got around to telling my story. Actually, back in March there wasn't much of a story to tell, but many things have changed since then. . . . Well, to give a little background about me, I am 33 years old and I have never been married. I have corresponded with Filipinas for eight years, taken three trips to the Philippines, and I have been engaged twice (once to an American and once to a Filipina). Now, after so many years of searching, I can finally say that I have met the lady of my dreams. Actually, meeting her took me completely by surprise, but it didn't keep me from recognizing that she is the one. Here is how it happened. Last summer (1999), I decided that I was over my last relationship and it was time to move on. . . . Well, I began acquiring addresses from a couple different correspondence clubs and I mailed many letters. By October, I was planning a three-week trip to the Philippines for April 2000. My plan was to make some new friends, hopefully meet someone special, and then continue to correspond after returning home. I was going to visit one pen pal in Hong Kong, two in Manila, one in Cebu, and one in Butuan City. Well, my first two pen pals were very attractive and very sweet, but there was no chemistry. Then, six days into my trip, I met my Jasmine. Maybe it's foolish to speak of love at first sight, but I don't know how else to describe the way I felt when I met her. There was something in her eyes that captured me from the start and I just couldn't get enough. We spent the next several hours talking and I couldn't believe my ears. The more I learned about her, the more convinced I was that she is the lady that I have always been looking for. I even told her that first night that I didn't feel the need to meet anyone else after meeting her. Unfortunately, there was a problem. [She] is the oldest in her family and she had made a commitment to support her three younger brothers through college. She had just returned from working in Singapore for two years, and she already had a job lined up in Hong Kong. Her intent was to work there for four years until her youngest brother finished school. Her mind was set to sacrifice her happiness for as long as it took to help her brothers, and it was obvious that marriage didn't fit into her plans. Well, over the next few days that we spent together, there was definitely a chem-

istry between us and I became more and more optimistic about establishing a relationship with her. My biggest obstacle was to convince her that she didn't have to choose between me and her family. If she wanted to marry me and come to the United States, I would be more than happy to help her to support her brothers. On our last day together, I told her that I loved her and I begged her not to go to Hong Kong. I do believe that she was tempted, but she had been "left at the pier" once before and she wasn't prepared to change all of her plans based on the few days that we spent together. Of course I was disappointed, but I completely understood. I even gained more respect for her because of her independence and her determination. Before I left the Philippines, I made her two promises. I promised to visit her in Hong Kong sometime in October and, more importantly, I promised to wait two years for her if she needed to finish her contract. The next few months were at the same time very happy and very lonely. I could not have imagined how much our love would grow during our time of separation. We wrote letters, we talked on the phone, and we emailed at every opportunity as we completely opened up to each other. Then, finally, on October 21, I flew to Hong Kong and proposed to her. We only had two days together, but they were two of the happiest days of my life. I'll only be happier when Jasmine and I are married so that we never have to be separated again. [She] is not happy in Hong Kong, but she wants to stay there while we process her papers. Understandably, she does not want to break her contract and return to the Philippines without any income while we wait for her fiance visa to be approved. In the beginning of our relationship, she said that she would be ready to get married after finishing her two-year contract. After about one month in Hong Kong, she said that she might break her contract in one year. Now that we are engaged, she is ready to start the paperwork now so that she can join me here as soon as possible. For those of you who are still with me, I have a question. I have heard that the U.S. consulate will not process her papers unless she has been in Hong Kong for at least one year. Does anyone know if this true? I have read at the INS website that it is totally at the discretion of the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong whether or not to process her papers since she is not from Hong Kong. I wonder if there is any way to find out in advance if they would be willing to do so. Well, I appreciate those of you who took the time to read my long story. I have more to write, but I'll save it until later.—BRUCE

Bruce's Internet posting tells a seemingly simple story. Beneath the surface, however, the story complicates and resists the more simplistic and exoticizing representations of correspondence courtship and marriage, highlighting instead the mundane, the practical, and the everyday. This narrative of encounter is not devoid of fantasy and desire, but the mode in which it is

conveyed is intentionally (and typically) spoken of as love and chemistry, in strikingly pragmatic and not explicitly erotic terms.

Newsgroups and Chats

Internet newsgroups and chats stand in contrast to the listserv community of men described above. Chats and newsgroups allow for a wider array of discordant voices and perspectives and a vocal critique of the inequalities and power imbalances of transnational marriage-scapes. I originally learned about "Pinay Brides—Internet's Hottest Commodities," an Internet news article on the "trafficking" of Filipinas, from the members of the UFG.[11] Online responses to the article on the ABS-CBN News website, from men and a few women in the United States and the Philippines, point to several common themes in the competing narratives about marriages between U.S. men and Asian women. Responses echoed popular media and antitrafficking images depicting mail-order brides as passive victims of the global economy who are forced to "sell themselves" to foreign men. They also pointed to the image depicted in the media (and by men whose relationships have failed) of women as active aggressors who marry Western men for green cards and material advantages. Situated in relation to both these images were the less well-known, antierotic counternarratives of family values and respectability that are told by U.S. men involved in correspondence relationships. Notably absent from the online responses to the news article were the voices of women who might be labeled mail-order brides but rarely define themselves as such.

"Pinay Brides" was published on a Philippine-based news website called ABS-CBN News, one of the many online sources that the UFG list members scan daily for news relating to China or the Philippines. The ABS-CBN News article described the activities of an introduction agency run by William McKnight, an American from Montana, and his Filipina wife, who was said to provide "foreigners with the chance to 'purchase' their own Filipina bride on the net." The article described how McKnight's agency managed to introduce prospective spouses under the guise of a travel agency, despite the illegality of mail-order brides in the Philippines. Since Republic Act 6955 was passed in 1990, it has been illegal to advertise in the Philippines for prospective brides for foreigners, but employees of the agency apparently visited department stores and approached "sales ladies" in person to ask if they were interested in marrying Americans.[12]

One member of the UFG was especially interested in the article for what it said about unsuspecting U.S. men who were taken advantage of by ruthless

agencies and deceitful young women. The article described Lilian, a Filipina whose sister worked for the agency, and James, a U.S. man who had come to meet her in the Philippines, had fallen in love with her, and had "married" her in a ceremony sponsored by the agency. James returned home to begin the procedure to apply for Lilian's U.S. visa. He also sent her a great deal of money by way of the agency, and then later learned that she had married another man. It became clear that Lilian's and James's marriage had never been official; the marriage had been "staged" and the agency had never filed the paperwork. After James returned to the United States, Lilian was convinced by her sister to marry another man through the agency. After describing James's pursuit of justice through the Philippine Center on Transnational Crime, the article ends as follows: "The typical Filipina mail order bride believes that marrying a foreigner is her ticket out of poverty. But it may also lead to a descending hell of spousal abuse or white slavery. Yet still the march goes on—of young Filipinas eager to sell body and soul for a way out of the country. As one Filipina succinctly says, better to be a foreigner's whore than a pauper's wife" (June 9, 2000).

The article received resounding response from Filipino and American readers in the United States and the Philippines, including responses from members of FAF and the UFG. In the four days following its publication, ABS-CBN News received more than two hundred readers' comments posted on its website. The responses were largely, but not entirely, from men. They represented an immense spectrum of positions, some of which I shall briefly describe. Although my characterization risks simplifying complex positions and their internal contradictions, three broad responses to the article can be characterized as coming from critics of neocolonialism, unabashed liberal pragmatists, and good old boys from the United States. My objective is to indicate how these three positions—each of which might be seen as reflecting "imagined selves and imagined worlds" (Appadurai 1996, 8)—contribute to a wider global and transnational discourse on the erotics and countererotics of correspondence marriages.

The first and most immediate response that reverberated for five days was that of the seemingly nationalistic critics of neocolonialism, most of whom seemed to be, based on their names, Filipino men. These messages were highly critical of the existence of such introduction agencies as that described in the article, appalled by the shameful existence of "MOBS" (mail-order brides) and of the foreign men who took advantage of Filipinas, and of the U.S.-Philippine history of colonialism and postcolonialism that has perpetuated Philippine economic dependency and government corruption.

The first angry cry urged calling on "the lovebug wizard" of computer virus fame to destroy the Internet site of the agency for the shame this caused the Philippines. Another message replied that the lovebug wizard was "not the real answer" but that the problem went far deeper. Some declared this "an embarrassment . . . nothing more than indirect prostitution." Another labeled it "another sad part of Philippine history." Several messages, including one by "bay agmo," berated the men who patronize these agencies, describing them as "losers, degenerates, dom, perverts in their own country" (June 10, 2000). Such comments clearly highlighted the erotic and exploitative aspects of these relationships.

The responses then moved in several directions, those of the American men who defended themselves, and the liberal pragmatists like Visuck Lat, who explicitly turned the blame away from the agencies and the women and into the realm of the state: "It is not the Internet business [that is] to blame but the roots of the poverty, i.e., the government. If RP has a better and well managed govt., I don't think human export will become its major commodities in today's world market. I feel sorry for those who married their foreign husband as a ticket from poverty, but they may be so smart and very practical in life. Issues like this (the headline) surfaces when a relationship failed and legal issues are attached" (June 10, 2000).

Visuck Lat's pragmatic defense of the women who take this "route out of poverty" was a theme repeated many times. "Combat Doc," was a Filipino-expatriate doctor who, in the course of his various messages, identified himself as a naturalized U.S. citizen who drives a Mercedes and is married to a white woman (thus laying himself wide open to a flood of criticisms from Filipino "compatriots back home" who attacked his patriotism at a distance).[13] He wrote that these women were "smart and courageous enough to recognize an opportunity and take it" (June 13, 2000) and that they

> are only doing what is BEST for them and their families. If the Phil. Govt was NOT AS USELESS AND CORRUPT AS IT IS, our women would not feel any need to go abroad to WORK OR MARRY. It is the govt's INEFFECTIVENESS AND USELESSNESS IN PROVIDING FOR ITS OWN PEOPLE that are driving its citizens to go elsewhere. These websites are great for providing a conduit for these SMART AND INTELLIGENT women to find a BETTER FUTURE ELSEWHERE. Their children will be US citizens with rights and opportunities that many can just DREAM ABOUT. They will have access to the best education. . . . They will drive their own cars in HS. . . . These children will have HIGH PAYING JOBS. . . . These children will have a govt that cares about them. (June 11, 2000)

Likewise, Pierre Tierra, another commenter, writes,

> Given a choice, a Filipina would rather be with her family in the Philippines IF THE FAMILY'S FINANCIAL SITUATION PERMITS IT. But because 95% of Filipino homes are in a desperate financial situation, the eldest child in the family (this can sometimes be a female) is forced to look for employment overseas as an OCW [Overseas Contract Worker] just to support their family. . . . Don't blame the "Internet Filipina Brides." Blame the corrupt officials for not putting the Philippine financial house in order. Dante wrote . . . that "the hottest spot in Hell is reserved for those who did not lift a finger to help their fellow men." . . . The Bible assures us that the prostitutes, the abandoned, society's "throw-aways" etc. will enter the Kingdom of Heaven first. . . . Dante Alighieri has already written where the souls of the corrupt and damned public officials will end up. (June 10, 2000)

Representing the "good old boys" from the United States and defending his and other Americans' marriages to Filipinas, Nathan Watts (who is quoted in the epigraph to this chapter) wrote the first, and one of the best-received, of all the U.S. men's responses. As a member of several lists for U.S. men married or engaged to Filipinas, and as someone who had met his wife through correspondence (because he thought U.S. women lack the "traditional family values" of Asian women), he criticized the article and many of the responses for not recognizing the sincerity of many men and women and their relationships:

> I have to agree that there are cases where the ladies are abused or treated as sex objects only. I am an American married to a Filipina. I do not smoke or use liquor of any kind nor do I use drugs. But my interest has never put me in situations where I could meet ladies here in the states. So I joined a penpal club. I wrote a letter to my wife's sister and she gave my letter to her sister who I married. I asked my wife the other day what [was] the biggest surprise she had when she met me. Her answer was that I was kind to her and her family. I belong to 3 groups that deal with immigration from the Philippines and between all groups membership is about 700 members. The love that the men have for their ladies is truly amazing. I love my wife and she is not a sex slave or my maid at all and there is a chance we may decide to live in the Philippines. Yes there are cases where there has been abuse or prostitution involved but this is rare. There are also cases where the ladies take advantage of their husbands. . . . One thing for sure I love my wife very much we only have a 15 year age difference and this makes it easier. When we married I agreed to assist her family and this is no problem in my book because I married a very special lady. I have a friend who had been married to his filipina

wife for over 27 years and he is also an American. But there will always be a few bad ones in every group. (June 10, 2000)

Many Filipinos commenting on the website applauded Watts's message. Visuck Lat wrote, "Your point is well taken and I admire you for your understanding and support to your extended family. May God bless you and your family. I'll go take on the day" (June 10, 2000). Pilosopo Tasyo responded, "Nathan Watts, you could be one of the gentle 'dolphins' [as opposed to sharks] I refer to above. Thank you so much for your kindness. In greater measure, may you and people like you be rewarded with continued joy, grace, and peace" (June 10, 2000). Likewise, Frank Navarro commented, "Very well said. Good natured people like you will always be successful. Go on brother" (June 11, 2000).

Yet despite the warm and conciliatory responses to Watts's message, hostility toward U.S. men reemerged in several other messages. When the commenter Randy Townley took it upon himself to defend William McKnight and the agency described in the article, a commenter identified as Red Dev replied, "Oh give me a break!!! Give it up! You know what you are and what you do! These men aren't looking for virtuous women, they're men who can't cut it with American women, or are looking for a poor soul who would be under their control to use in anyway they want. It's because of their misfortune that this man is making an 'honest' living, isn't it? If he really wanted to help, he wouldn't charge a fee, don't you think? You can hide behind words all you want, but you're nothing but WHOREMONGERS AND PIMPS!!!" (June 10, 2000). Townley apologized for his avid defense of McKnight. After further inquiry, he learned that he was "incorrect." Red Dev's reply coolly advised Townley of the wisdom of doing his homework next time, "before making grand denouncements" (June 10, 2000).

In response to bay agmo's statement that the foreign men who marry Filipinas are "losers, degenerates, dom, perverts in their own country," Two Otap, an American married to a Filipina, wrote, "PINOYS have a REP[utation] as being drunkards, 2 timing, dead beat scumbags who do not deserve to be with a FILIPINA. Think about that before you call western men whom go to the RP to marry a FILIPINA loosers etc." (June 11, 2000). Surprisingly, the discussion did not escalate into further insults. A presumably Filipina commenter identified as Kalidad Sanchez wrote, "I agree! If Filipino men could take better care of their women then she would not be in every part of the world working as a domestic to some other family. It is not the Philippine government we should change—it's our whole mind set. . . . Time for a

change. . . . What is happening is just a sign of the times. Filipina women are waking up. . . . If we do not take better care of them they will certainly go [to] those they perceive will" (June 13, 2000). Bay agmo added, "It is interesting that many of the males are decades older than the female. . . . There might be a few success stories but I'm still not buying it" (June 14, 2000). Several other men whose names I recognized from lists emphasized and elaborated on Watts's points, adding their own narratives or a Christian dimension to their marital commitment.

After five days, messages repeated the same patterns: U.S. men criticized the term and the notion of "mail-order brides" and defended their position on the basis of having experienced their own relationships as sincere and loving and based on "traditional" and "old fashioned" family values. Filipino critics such as "Apocalypse" bemoaned the shame and embarrassment of mail-order brides and asserted, "Filipinos should not allow anyone to market them as brides. It is better to die of hunger than to be a commodity exposed for wolves to devour. There is our dignity and self respect. Who will respect us if we practice these embarrassing acts?" (June 11, 2000).[14] Others put them in their place. Kalidad Sanchez wrote: "Oh grow up! Embarrassing?? Not to want to marry and slave for some good for nothing husband? For loving and marrying and bearing children? Our mothers made the same choices. Perhaps you should ask them if they have any regrets. Are we racist or what?!" (June 13, 2000). Many continued to question the source of the problem, poverty, government corruption, or global inequality, and to discover the underlying truth. Visuck Lat ended on a more philosophical and conciliatory note, asking, "Those Amboys are losers? Those girls are opportunist? Or We're jealous? . . . In my opinion it's their lives and let's not intervene in their personal matters whether they are losers, opportunist[s] or really in love, its their life, it's their choice and I assumed they are all mature enough to make such decisions. We're only human anyway and obviously nothing is perfect in this world" (June 13, 2000).

The views encapsulated in the Internet news forum pointed to many powerful critiques of neocolonialism and postcolonialism. They echoed critiques found in the popular media and among antitrafficking organizations of passive mail-order brides and women who are said to be "trafficked" by men and introduction agencies, and of women who would (supposedly) do anything for the material benefits marriage to a foreigner would afford her. Yet such stark and all-encompassing representations of women as agents or victims often do not mesh with women's own experiences. The news forum reflects the views of U.S. men who resist the characterization of their mar-

riages as trafficking and their wives as bought or sold. It also portrays the voices of Filipinos who decry the shame of such an industry or of "their" women "prostituting" themselves to foreign men. What we did not hear were the voices of women who might be labeled mail-order brides.

In the online news discussion, women were spoken of by husbands, fathers, and compatriots. They were defended and criticized, and they became the ground on which a broader discourse on gender, nationalism, and colonialism is played out, discussed, or argued (Chatterjee 1993; Gonzalez and Rodriguez 2003; Mani 1987; Mohanty 1991). Women who are involved in transnational marriages, who might understandably be loath to identify themselves as mail-order brides are absent from the discussion. Perhaps this is because few women identify themselves as mail-order brides, but rather as women, daughters, immigrants, or wives of Filipinos or foreign men. As Kalidad Sanchez and Combat Doc suggested, Filipinas must contend with marriages in the Philippines or abroad and make decisions based on their own and their families' best interests. This they do within the context of ever more readily available (yet nonetheless structurally constrained) global options and opportunities. Regardless of possible material gains or improvements they hope to gain for themselves or their family members, they reject sterile market analogies and views of themselves as commodities embodying simplistic stereotypes. It is not surprising, therefore, that except in cases where their marriages have failed or in the most blatant cases of abuse, women do not identify themselves as—or with—the notion of "mail-order brides" or women who are "trafficked."

Conclusion

A key challenge in my wider research has been to allow for the possibility that correspondence marriages are and can be understood as something other than a sensational caricature of themselves. If the research goal is to provide deeper, richer, and more thorough understandings of the varied and complex meanings of such relationships, then it is necessary to resist the temptation to reduce them to a few fundamental—though admittedly important—racial, sexual, and erotic tendencies. The fact that marriages have both sexual and economic dimensions, that sex workers sometimes marry clients or have relationships that are not purely sexual and economic, and that both prostitutes and mail-order brides are assumed to be essentially poor and desperate, help to explain men's urgent countererotic defensiveness. The hostile, defensive, and unfriendly responses sometimes expressed by men online are linked to their desire to distance their marital choices

from eroticized images that highlight the blurred line between marriage and prostitution. The men I encountered in this research often denied, sidestepped, ignored, or censored the political, racial, and sexual implications of their relationships. Yet all marital relationships, not just those based on international correspondence, involve sex and money, and all take place within particular historically gendered contexts of power.

One challenge is to understand and acknowledge the historical and social contexts in which erotic desire is produced, but also to understand the value of not reducing all correspondence relationships (and the men and women involved in them) to a boiled-down ideological essence of eroticism and racial and gender inequality. Widespread tendencies to highlight the erotic and sensational dimensions of correspondence relationships, and counter-erotic tendencies to deny or evade such stereotypes, risk overlooking what I would argue are significant and less sensational experiences and expressions of marital sentiment, migratory desire, and global imagining.

Internet technology has allowed for the emergence of a widespread, global, discursive network linking men from the United States and elsewhere who seek foreign brides, Filipinas (and women of other nationalities) who are open to the possibility of marrying men abroad, and many others—including anthropologists. Asian women participate by sending their names to online agencies and corresponding with foreign men. Men from the United States form Internet lists to provide a sense of community and support as they navigate the process of correspondence courtship and marriage. They respond collectively—as a defensive discursive community of shared sentiment—to oppose critical erotic representations of their relationships. They disavow or sidestep the issue of racial and gender inequality and produce alternative countererotic narratives and discourses about their marriages. These Internet discourses emphasize love, commitment, morality, and oppose the sexual aspects of stereotypes and images of Asian women. As we have seen, Filipinos in the Philippines and the United States contribute a critical dimension to the discourse on mail-order brides. Cumulatively, the voices on the Internet make up a global, discursive network of sorts—not one that is homogenous, unchanging, or unified, or one that is egalitarian or devoid of privilege or exclusions, but one in which perspectives and viewpoints are aired, and in which different identities and subjectivities linked to class, race, nationality, and gender are articulated, inscribed and reinscribed, and imagined and reimagined.

The Internet often serves to reinforce and stabilize conventional stereotypes of Asian women and of relationships between Asian women and

Western men, as in the case of Western men's sex-tourist blogs (Bishop and Robinson 2002). But the Internet also offers opportunities for new and unique forms of sociality and for spaces in which erotics and countererotics of desire are actively contested and debated. Kristina Wong's cyber-feminist mock mail-order bride website is one striking example (Hudson 2007). In an online context, "Asian brides" may be billed as one of "the Internet's hottest commodities," but such media texts are also adapted, appropriated, reconfigured, and rejected as they travel between Asia and other parts of the online and offline world. Online communities and networks of Western men who seek foreign marriage partners through correspondence have created new arenas for expressing oppositional countererotic definitions of mail-order marriages. Although these men largely draw from one side of the well-known stereotype of "Asian woman" as good wife or prostitute, they nonetheless make use of the Internet to create an oppositional space from which to actively promote and circulate countererotic images of Asian women. These images stand in striking opposition to many prevailing eroticized stereotypes of the sorts of men and women who enter into correspondence marriages.

Notes

Although my analysis has a markedly different focus, this chapter includes some primary material that was previously published by the University of California Press in *Romance on a Global Stage: Pen Pals, Virtual Ethnography and "Mail Order" Marriages* (2003). My thanks to Joseph S. Alter, Ding Naifei, and Greg Downey for very helpful suggestions; Teri Silvio for an inspiring conference on "Asian Digital Cultures" at the Academia Sinica, Taiwan, July 28–29, 2005; and Louisa Schein and Purnima Mankekar for encouraging me to explore the discourses of countererotics and for their many helpful comments.

1. "Asian" women are of course a heterogeneous group, as are "Western" men, but stereotypes commonly homogenize, overgeneralize, and blur such categories. For discursive analyses of mail-order brides and catalogues, see, for example, the work of Angeles and Sunanta (2007), Constable (2003), Halualani (1995), Holt (1996), Robinson (1996), Tajima (1989), Tolentino (1996), Villapando (1989), and Wilson (1988). See the work of Gonzalez and Rodriguez (2003) for a provocative critical examination of representations of Filipinas on the web, including mail-order brides. See Arvidsson's (2006) study on the role of branding and fantasy in Internet dating.

2. By "communities" I do not mean to imply that they are somehow egalitarian, democratic, or undifferentiated, but point instead to forms of virtual sociality that are formed through regular and patterned social interactions. A sizable body of early literature has shown that online communities are complex, organized, and worthy of study (e.g., Bell 2001; Bell and Kennedy 2000; Hine 2000; Jacobson 1996, 1999; Lyman and Wake-

ford 1999; Miller and Slater 2000; Rheingold 1992; Stone 1995). Scholars of new media have argued that the Internet is far from the utopian site once imagined (E. G. Coleman 2010). Although it offers opportunities for counterhegemonic or subversive voices (Hudson 2007), inequalities such as those of gender and race are often reproduced online (Burkhalter 1999; Nakamura 2007; O'Brien 1999; Smith and Kollock 1999). Gonzalez and Rodriguez show how gendered and raced inequalities continue to be reproduced and how, "in cyberspace, the ideologies and technologies of racialization and sexualization materialize on the Filipina body" (2003, 219).

3. My wider project focused on Chinese women and Filipinas, but this chapter focuses exclusively on the U.S. and Filipino dimension.

4. On Filipino-Australian marriages, see the work of Cahill (1990), Cooke (1986), Holt (1996), and Robinson (1996). On Filipinas who have married rural Japanese men, see the work of Faier (2009), Piper (1997), and Suzuki (2000a, 2000b, 2005). On Filipinas who have married northern and western European and North American men, see "The Asian Bride Boom," *Asiaweek*, April 15, 1983, 36–38, 43–45; and the work of Cahill (1990) and USDOJ-INS (1999). See the work of Y. Chen (2005), Hsia (2004, 2010), Tsay (2004), and Wang and Bélanger (2008) on international marriages in Taiwan, and the work of Constable (2005a) and Jones and Shen (2008) on other East and Southeast Asian transnational marriage flows. See Kim's (2010) study on international marriage migration.

5. Robert Scholes (1999) notes that within the 202 introduction agencies he located in 1998, 70 percent of the women were Filipino.

6. Images of Russian and Eastern European women were more suggestive or explicitly sexy.

7. Names of listservs and their participants are pseudonyms.

8. It is noteworthy that I was admitted to the "men's" list but not to the women's. The moderators may have assumed that I would learn more from that list, that they could keep a better eye on me there, or—as others have noted—that my status as a Westerner placed me in a position that was more analogous to that of the men (and the few Western women) on the list. The overall result was that I had greater contact with the Western men than Filipinas on FAF.

9. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), part of the U.S. Department of Justice, ceased to exist in 2003. It has since been replaced by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The enforcement and investigative section is U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

10. The men I met through these Internet groups seemed to fit the overall sociological and demographic profile found in other studies. Although UFG members self-selected from those who belonged to FAF and were willing to communicate with me, their views did not seem to differ much from men I met in person or on other lists. Comparing UFG communications with archived messages from the other private lists reflects little difference in content or tone. Moreover, although individuals can and do "invent" identities and role-play on the Internet, it would be difficult to maintain such

a charade for two or three years, just as it is difficult to do in repeated and prolonged face-to-face fieldwork encounters. See, for example, Michael Lewis, "Jonathan Lebed: Stock Manipulator, S.E.C. Nemesis—and 15," *New York Times Magazine*, February 25, 2001; Michael Lewis, "Faking It: The Internet Revolution Has Nothing to Do with the Nasdaq," *New York Times Magazine*, July 15, 2001; and the work of Stone (1995) and Van Gelder (1996). On all the lists, men policed and criticized one another openly. Some moderators explicitly defined "off topics" and banned flamers or those who presented blatantly racist views or what were considered sexual perversions. Although sometimes criticized, disparaging remarks about Western women and discussions of the advantages of Asian spouses were voiced openly. My presence did not seem to promote much self-censorship or political correctness.

11. "Pinay Brides—Internet's Hottest Commodities," *ABS-CBN News*, parts 1–4, June 9, 2000, accessed June 14, 2000, http://www.abs-cbnnews.com.

12. Ordonez points out that the legislation enacted in 1990 to "ban personal advertising and to penalize local recruiters" has done little to stop the "supply of Filipino women," because women are easily recruited among OCWs and through other means (1997, 137).

13. See Vergara's (1996) analysis of how "departure" may be viewed as "betrayal of the nation."

14. See Aguilar's (1996) work on the relationship between commodified Filipino labor, nationalism, and shame.

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FLOWS BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND THE CLINIC

Desiring Production and Social Production in Urban Beijing

In urban China, doctors of both biomedicine and traditional Chinese medicine have become active in communicating with people through mass media since the beginning of the reform (particularly since the early 1990s). Their participation is made possible by changes in the media. In the Maoist period, the media acted as the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, to impart the message of the party and the state and foster the socialist ethos of collectivism. Several decades of reform have turned the media into institutions largely motivated by economic incentives (i.e., profiting from advertisements). They have changed from being a self-contained system of work units responsive only vertically to the state to being a center of informational and cultural production responsive horizontally to the audience, in spite of continuous tight regulations from the state, particularly on the issues the state considers capable of provoking "instability of the country." This change has turned the media into a site of dynamic interplay between the state and the market, between individuals and collective forces, a miniature of the whole society in transformation.[1]

In the late 1990s I began to pay attention to doctors' involvement in the production of media messages in my fieldwork in a clinic and continued to observe it in the early 2000s. The doctors not only attracted an audience to their shows but also produced flows of patients to their clinics out of that audience. Dr. Ma, in Xingyixueke (性医学科, the Department of Sexual Medicine) of Yuquan Hospital in Beijing, is an example. As a doctor of biomedicine, he specializes in "sexual medicine" and treats sexually related disorders. His medical practice was intimately related to media production. He

was a regular guest speaker on radio and TV, and a guest for forums on the Internet. Most regularly he participated in *Whispering Tonight* (今夜私語時), a call-in show on Beijing People's Radio Station, and in *Life, Reproduction, and Everyday Life* (生命生育生活), a program of Beijing Television Station (BTV). He received more patients the morning right after he went on the air than on other mornings of the week. Sometimes, he received twice as many patients the day after his show as on other week days. Walking into the consultation room and sitting down, many patients greeted him by saying, "Ma Laoshi [老師, teacher], I heard you on the air" or "You must be Ma Laoshi. I listen to your show." In the opposite direction, some patients became or remained regular listeners of Dr. Ma after they saw him in the clinic, forming a circuit of flows of patients and audience members moving between the media and the clinic.[2]

This circuit of flows between *Whispering Tonight*, the show, and the sexual medicine clinic is embedded in the overall post-Mao social transformations.[3] What was driving the flows? What happened to the individuals whose moves constituted the flows on the one hand and whose orientations were being reshaped by the flows on the other hand? What can the microprocess of remaking the patients as well as listeners in the circuit tell us about the overall transformation?

Media Virtuality and Clinical Actuality

Ethnographic studies of the relationship between the media and China's transformation have developed greatly, mostly focusing on how reception and consumption of the media shaped new subjectivity of the audience (e.g., Erwin 2000; Farrer 2006; Friedman, this volume; Rofel 2007a; Schein 2008; Sun 2009; Sun and Choi 2012; Yang 1997). But most of the media effect was seen in discussions and opinions among the audience. The fact that many patients were listeners of Dr. Ma's radio talk show triggered my curiosity about how their circular move manifested the interaction between the clinic and the media that not only changed the perspectives of the audience but also induced their actions, turning transparent the process of subject making. To observe the flows, I followed him to the radio station and listened to his show, and paid special attention to his listeners showing up in the clinic. I realized that the link between the radio station and the clinic was a link between two different spaces. I conceptualize this link into the one between media virtuality and clinical actuality.

"Media virtuality" refers to the sensorial and mental imagery of a concept,

a concern, or a sentiment constituted in the communication between the media and the audience. The term "clinical actuality" bears a resemblance to the term "clinical reality." Defining the negotiation between the patient's model of illnesses and the professional model of disease, "clinical reality" refers to a synthesis of what was brought in by the interplay—"the beliefs, expectations, norms, behaviors, and communicative transactions associated with sickness, health care seeking, practitioner-patient relationships, therapeutic activities, and evaluation of outcomes" (Kleinman 1980, 42). Integrating the effect of the media on clinical encounters, "clinical actuality" turns medical action into the process of negotiating or even redefining the subjectivity of the patients.

The intimate relationship between "media virtuality" and "clinical actuality" is derived from Deleuze's discussion of the relationship between virtuality and actuality (Deleuze 1994, 2004). Unlike the common understanding that equates the virtual with the "unreal," virtuality has its own reality, resonating with Baudrillard's validation of virtuality as real.[4] Virtuality is not opposed to the real, because it is real (Deleuze 1994, 208). Instead, virtuality is opposed to actuality, whereas possibility is opposed to the real. Whereas possibility turns real through "realization," virtuality actualizes itself through "differenciation" (Deleuze 1994, 211). Note that "differenciation," a Deleuzian term, is different from "differentiation," because "differenciation" refers to "a genuine creation" that possesses a problem to be solved, whereas differentiation determines the virtual content prior to actualization (Deleuze 1994, 209–14).

Almost all questions and answers during the call-in show concern the differentials between the audience's bodily experience and the virtual, normal body conjured up by the doctor. By motivating the audience to address the gap (a problem) between their bodies and the virtual, normal body and to act on their own bodies, the sensorial, mental imagery of the virtual, normal body differenciates (actualizes) into the flows of patients toward the clinic for local, medical solutions, a process I call the actualization of the virtual body.[5]

Because the double identity (listener and patient) is centered around the desire to have a normal body capable of sexual desire and pleasure, the flows between media virtuality and clinical actuality are essentially flows of desire. Forming and maintaining such flows constituted what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) called "desiring production." At first glance, desiring production refers to the production of desire in capitalist production (being motivated

and stirred up to gain capital, make investment, obtain ownership, etc.), whereas social production refers to the production of social relations in classic Marxist terms.

But Deleuze and Guattari collapsed the divide between the production of desire and social production, and pointed out that the production of desire depends on, constitutes, and overcomes the production of the social.[6] An analysis of capitalist production is nothing but an analysis of the combination of political economy and the economy of desire, examining "the intrinsic power of desire to create its own object" and understanding "the objective being of man, for whom to desire is to produce, to produce within the realm of the real" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 25, 27). In the end, "social production is purely and simply desiring production itself under determinate conditions" (29).

That the body emerged as the focus of one's attention and investment (time, money, energy, etc.) in order to have a normal body was evidence of social production embodied by desiring production. Three important changes constituted the "determinate conditions" for the flows between the media and the clinic to emerge. The first was the marketization of both the media and the clinic. The hospitals and the radio stations both had a strong incentive to generate as many listeners and patients as possible in the circuit. At the same time, listeners and patients also obtained a consumer identity by consuming both virtual images and medicines. Even though the radio call-in show was free to listen to, a number of factors made it an act of consumption. For example, in addition to the expense involved in making phone calls, writing letters, or sending short text messages to the radio stations, the listeners were exposed to the commercials of medicine on the air, a phenomenon that began in post-Mao reform. A listener had the potential to become a consumer of medicine through becoming a patient, forming a relationship between production and consumption of both signs and materials.

The second condition was the de-moralization of social life and the body. Paying attention to the body through a new perspective from the radio, one shifted the attention away from the Maoist moralism focusing on the purity of the soul (for example, attending small group meetings to engage in self-criticism for materialistic aspirations) toward care about one's immediate bodily interests.[7] The desire to have a normal body was first and foremost historical flight from moralization of the body and diseases (particularly sexually related diseases), differing from the seemingly similar process of medicalization in some other contexts.[8] Furthermore, the increased choices

in what to listen to contributed to the rise of individual choices in the society in the "consumer revolution."[9]

Broadcasting Individual Desire

When it was first aired in 1998, the call-in show *Whispering Tonight* lasted one hour each time, from 10:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Three types of questions were often raised through the hotline. The first type concerned bodily irregularities or discomfort (e.g., lower back pain after intercourse, small penises, etc.). The second type concerned anxiety about certain sexual impulses, behaviors, and capacities, such as erectile failure, premature ejaculation, masturbation, and so on. The third type concerned certain medication and food (such as the comparison between Viagra and herbal tonics strengthening the kidney yang). These three types of concerns converged on the issue of the normal body. The following question from a listener exemplifies how the desire to be normal was addressed. A remarried man asked, "When I had sex with my ex-wife, she did not make any sound. We got divorced ten years after our marriage. Different from my ex-wife, my current wife was very sensitive. She would scream as soon as I just touched her through her pants. We live in a two room apartment. My old parents live just in the room next to ours. It feels awkward when my wife gets excited so easily. Who is more normal, my ex or my wife?" Dr. Ma answered, "Your current wife is more normal."

I was a little surprised by Dr. Ma's black and white answer about sexual normality concerning such details, partly because many answers from him were not so black and white, and partly because the "habitual" alertness of an anthropologist trained in the United States to any tendency to essentialize sexual normality that would curtail creative sexual life and oversimplify sexual enjoyment.[10] But the other part of my anthropological "self"—my life experience in China—cautioned me against swift judgments and brought my attention to the construction of sexological truth in the Chinese context.

Dr. Ma was a sexologist because he had familiarized himself with works of Western classic sexology. He was the main translator of the Chinese edition of Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Response* and *Human Sexual Inadequacy*. He was also the major author of *Modern Sexuality* in Chinese. He holds a diploma from the American Sexology Board. Yet, what defines him as a sexologist is a kind of experience a sexologist in the West is unlikely to have. Dr. Ma was trained as a doctor of biomedicine. But he was not prepared to talk about sexual health until many years after he graduated in the 1960s from Beijing Medical College, one of the most prestigious medical schools in China. As a medical school student, he was not taught about

human sexuality then, except the reproductive body. In his recollection, only during his residency, when a senior doctor told him not to touch "that spot" (the clitoris) as he was examining a female body, did he start to wonder why. One of the professors in his medical school had coauthored a very basic sex education book in the 1950s and was tortured to death in the Cultural Revolution. Dr. Ma's experience of being sent down to a People's Commune in the half agriculture and half animal husbandry area in Qinghai Province in the west and becoming a doctor of the commune health care station was an eye opener. Coming from Beijing, he was shocked by the "openness" of the local Hui and Zang (Tibetan) ethnic minority people in enjoying sex. Unlike in Beijing, people there were free in talking about sex on all kinds of public occasions, such as meetings in the warehouse, or in the barn, or right in the field. It was not unusual that several men and a woman turned erotic play into sex in the field of crops.[11] One boy got married in his teens and had married several times by the age of twenty. Having spent nine years in Qinghai, Dr. Ma heard many stories, including that of someone who had intercourse five times in one night, and that of someone who liked to swallow semen. He was shocked to the degree that almost three decades later he could easily come up with a long list of those sexual episodes in his memory.

Dr. Ma's story of "internal Orientalism," regarding exotic sexuality among ethnic minorities in Qinghai (Schein 1997), contrasted with the sexless medical education he had received in Beijing. What is more, his discovery of "Chinese sexuality," documented in ancient literature he first read in England as a visiting scholar in the early 1980s, convinced him that there was something pretty "un-Chinese" in Chinese sexuality in the recent or not too recent history of China. In a library in England he had access for the first time in his life to Chinese ancient literatures of bedchamber arts, such as *Sunu Jing* (素女经, The classic of plain girl) and *Yufang Miju* (玉房秘诀, Secrets of the jade chamber).[12] The literature of ancient Chinese sexual culture inspired him to talk about sex in a comfortable way in public, against the asexual culture he had been exposed to in Beijing in the Maoist period. He was convinced that instead of the stereotypical prudishness of the Chinese there had been a tradition of openness about sexual life in Chinese history, an openness that was lost, however, or pushed to the margin. This is why Dr. Ma was so sure that making sounds during sex, on the part of the female, was more normal than doing it without making any sound. This seemingly essentialist judgment carried with it an implication of articulating sexual desire against sexual repression.

Equally important was his daily contact with physical bodies of patients

5.1. Dr. Ma making a presentation at a conference on sexual health in Beijing.

and their problems with sex in everyday life. It was not unusual for a man to become suicidal because he imagined he was impotent, even though he had never had sex or had had sex only once but failed. Nor was it unusual for a man's imagined impotence to turn real precisely because of the imagined fear of failure, or for a girl to become desperate only because of several black hairs on her upper lip that make her "neither a man nor a woman," or for a woman to feel extremely guilty about having sexual fantasies while having sex with her husband, or for a man who has been married for years (the extreme case was nine years) but had not succeeded at penetrating his wife even once. There was a lot of anguish underneath the surface of everyday life.

Also, many people complained that they had no place to go if they wanted to get consultation about their sexual problems. For example, Dr. Ma realized that if a woman had problems with sexual desire, there was virtually no place for her to get consultation and solutions. When *nanke* (men's medicine) was established in many places in China in the 1980s, men had a place to see doctors for sexual problems such as impotence. If a woman walked into a gynecology division, which ironically had been an established division of Chinese medicine for more than a millennium, to seek consultation about sexual pleasure instead of reproduction, both the woman and the doctor would feel awkward. Worse, the woman might get a strange look from the

doctor and be told, "You have come to the wrong place." But where was the right place? In the mid-1990s Dr. Ma was authorized to open the first hospital department under the name of sexual medicine in China that treats both female and male sexual problems. His involvement in both sexual medicine and *Whispering Tonight*, the show, exemplified his determination to bring out the discussion of sexual desire in public.

Regardless of how similar (or different) sexual problems might have been between Maoist socialism and post-Mao consumer society, the contrast between the way the body and sex were talked about in public is absolutely enormous. It was those discussions of the body in public in the post-Mao era that legitimated the concern with one's bodily discomfort and its expression in public space, allowed the body to draw public attention, and articulated individual desire. The articulation of desire was made possible by changes in the media. Two significant changes in the media that contributed to the articulation of individual desire were speaking softly and "bodying" the language.

SPEAKING SOFTLY

It was impossible for shows like *Whispering Tonight* to emerge without great changes in the tone of voice of the broadcasters. Techniques, styles, and norms of communication in the media under Maoist socialism, particularly in the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), remained highly centralized and tightly controlled until the 1980s. Because the media was first and foremost the mouthpiece of the party and the state, the style was rigid, the tone of voice of the announcers or anchorpersons usually high pitched and argumentative, the performance of the broadcasters highly scripted, and interactions between the media and the audience rare.

Remembering the tone of voice of broadcasters and anchorpersons in the 1970s, I felt immediately attracted to Ms. Sun's very intimate, soft, and almost sweet introduction of the show when I first listened to the program: "Dear listener friends, it is the time again for *Whispering Tonight* on middle wave 603 megahertz of our Beijing People's Radio Station to meet you. I am Sun Yan." Many listener-patients revealed the same feelings.

One cannot take this way of speaking for granted. Media virtuality is embedded in general sociality and functions under its regulating forces. The socialist state had been the sole regulating force for more than three decades, decades in which broadcasting was full of the "smells of gunpowder" characteristic of the era of class struggle. When I was working for a radio station as a reporter and an assistant editor of a program in the early 1980s in a big

city in southwestern China, an anchorwoman found herself having difficulty adopting a soft style of broadcasting in the new era, because of her habitual, forceful tone of voice formed in broadcasting texts such as editorials of the *People's Daily* and long, heavy-duty articles of revolutionary repudiations (革命大批判), a routine in the Maoist period. Back then an anchorperson would begin a program by announcing: "Revolutionary Comrades, now I will broadcast." At the beginning of the reform era, the introduction of the words "please" and "listener friends" to the vocabulary of broadcasting at the radio station I worked for caused a sensational transformation of the media space, bringing about a sense of closeness between listeners and broadcasters, and a kind of smile that "can be heard" on the air.

Eileen Otis's work on how the smile became part of the new regime of discipline in the service industry in post-Mao consumer society, and on how it shaped a gendered, commodified space of subjectivity, can help us understand the two sides of this normalizing function of bodily discipline (Otis 2012). On the one hand, the service industry moved away from the tense and unfriendly treatment of customers that, to a large degree, resulted from scarcity and the lack of choice. Anyone who has had the experience of going shopping in the Maoist period (particularly in the 1970s) would remember well the long lines of customers and the unfriendly treatment. On the other hand, the new regime of discipline, including smiling, commercializes the bodies of service personnel and creates an impression of equality and congeniality among the consumers.

The complex effect of the commercialization of the body, including the requirement of smiling, triggered debates in the media in the early 1990s as to whether a smiling face of the service person is an improvement. Emphasizing the "hypocritical and alienated nature" of the use of the body in the consumer society, one view was critical of the commercialized, "inauthentic" smile because it was motivated by profit and signified the emerging regime of gender and class hierarchy, though it did so through creating a false appearance of democratic consumption. However, many who had lived in the Maoist period and were used to seeing the cold and unsmiling faces of revolutionary service members (革命服务员) simply preferred the "hypocritical smile" to the "sincere" coldness. The good feeling gained from hearing the "smiling voice" on the air concurred with the argument in favor of the "smiling face."

Another component responsible for this change was the emerging question-and-answer format, through either letters or hotlines.[13] This format turned the media into a more personal space than ever before. At the

beginning of the reform, it was quite something when radio stations aired programs in response to the requests or questions of the audience. One of those programs was *Songs Chosen by Listeners* (听众点播). It was rewarding for many listeners to hear their names being read aloud on the air and their choices accepted. Although each time only a very small portion of letters from the audience was eventually picked up by editors, a large number of letters continued to pour in to the radio station each week. The letters articulated the increasing demand for individual space and attention in the public, resonating with the decentralization of economic as well as social life, a departure from the previous era, when being an anonymous hero (无名英雄) was encouraged. In the 1990s and the 2000s the interactive format in radio broadcasting was common.

This format looks like no big deal now, but it was unthinkable to have live conversations between broadcasters and listeners when everything had to be recorded before it was aired, a measure taken to maintain revolutionary vigilance because of a possible sabotage on the battlefront of public opinion (舆论阵地) in the Maoist period. In the nerve-racking, precarious atmosphere of heightened class struggle back then, a radio announcer who made what Charles Bosk (2003) would call a "technical error" on the air—reading a key word wrong and reversing the meaning of the sentence—could immediately be accused of making a moral and political mistake. This "normative error," in Bosk's terms, would jeopardize the broadcaster's political status and credentials. In contrast, direct interactions between the audience and the broadcasters now expanded room for more spontaneous and less scripted performance to emerge, and therefore opened up a new horizon for reordering the senses, imaginations, and analytics on the air.

I also realized, when I saw Ms. Sun and the technical assistant not shutting the door of the studio tightly, that the vigilance toward background noises during broadcasting had lowered significantly since the late 1970s. I asked Ms. Sun whether this was part of the general tendency to soften the tone of voice in broadcasting. She said it was partly so and partly because of the great improvement of the quality of the microphone. By softening the tone of voice, broadcasters (particularly talk show hosts) started to speak as they would when chatting with people off the air.

BODYING THE LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC

Almost every word in the call-in show of *Whispering Tonight* was about the body. I call this phenomenon "bodying the language."[14] The hostess, Ms. Sun, a graduate of Beijing Broadcasting College with a major in anchoring, had

5.2. Dr. Ma reading letters from listeners sorted out by Ms. Sun before the show in the radio station begins.

been hosting several programs, including programs on legal education, on flowers and plants for the family, and on adolescent education. *Whispering Tonight* was the one she liked most and found most rewarding, because she felt very close to specific members of the audience. This closeness had to do with the fact that the audience showed great curiosity about their own bodies, bodily irregularities, or bodily discomforts. As Ms. Sun described, listeners now liked to *zhuomo* (琢磨) their own bodies. "Zhuomo" has two connotations. One is to carve and polish jade. The other is to think something over, or to turn something over in one's mind. Either taking action to perfect the body or turning something over in their minds, individuals were encouraged to pay attention to their bodies.

Again, we should not take the phenomenon of bodying the language for granted. In the Maoist period, public discourse discouraged one from paying attention to oneself, including one's own body. *Wubingshenyin* (无病呻吟), which means "to moan and groan without being ill," and *xiaobingdayang* (小病大养), which means "to pay excessive attention to a small illness," were common criticisms of anyone who was suspected of lacking revolutionary will. Many who had had the experience of listening to the radio in the Maoist period may remember well that in broadcast stories, particularly in long feature stories (长篇通讯), revolutionary heroes were often praised for en-

during discomfort, pain, and illnesses without seeking medication. Illnesses were often regarded as a test of one's moral strength and loyalty to the party, the country, and Chairman Mao.

The purpose of downplaying illnesses and emphasizing heroism was to give priority to the collective body. As a result, the language used in talking about the body was highly moralized. For example, it was common to quote a hero as saying: "This headache and fever do not matter; what matters is the revolutionary cause!" The body was disparaged as though a revolutionary cause should be disembodied. But it was not that health was completely disregarded. Instead, it was often emphasized. For example, "shenti shi geming de benqian" (身體是革命的本錢, the healthy body is the most fundamental investment for the revolutionary cause) was a common slogan, but the focus was on how the healthy body was a means for strengthening the revolutionary cause as an end.[15] In other words, one should be concerned about bodily discomfort as a threat to one's ability to contribute to the collective cause and ultimately a threat to the collective cause. It is no wonder that in public discourse the body—and bodily pain and discomfort—became a site of struggle for political and moral purity. To borrow Nietzsche's words, the concerns during the Maoist era about collective moral purity that took precedence over concerns for the individual body reflected the beliefs of those who "despised the body: they left it out of the account; more they treated it as an enemy" (1968, 131).

The phenomenon of "paying attention to the body" and "bodying the language" exemplified by the call-in show indicated the relocation of the body from the periphery toward the center of public attention. Over the past decades, the Chinese had drastically increased their consumption of material goods and investment in private property. But perhaps one of the most significant changes was that the body had emerged as an increasingly important target for the investment of time, money, and energy. The slogan "The body is the most fundamental investment for revolution," used in the Maoist period, could now well be rewritten as "The body is the most fundamental investment for individual enjoyment."[16] In the show *Whispering Tonight*, listeners asked questions concerning the sexual body, ranging from serious obstacles to sexual pleasure and reproduction, questions involving impotence and infertility and what looked like rather insignificant irregularities. A man was concerned about a small growth on the foreskin. A woman was asking about several black spots on her husband's penis. Questions about the colors of urine, the density of semen, or the size of the scrotum were often heard on the air. It was those seemingly trivial public discussions of the body that

5.3. Dr. Ma getting ready to "whisper" on sexuality on the air.

allowed the body to emerge as the focus of public attention. Even though now in city streets or on the Internet one can get an impression of the excess of signs (posters, advertisements, etc.) and voices talking about the body and an indulgence in the body, there was a complete lack of this kind of public attention to the body merely three decades ago.

FROM DESIRE TO BE MORAL TO DESIRE TO BE NORMAL

It took a while for Ms. Sun to become relaxed in talking about the body and sex, however. She recalled how uncomfortable she had felt when she first wrote down the term *shouyin* (手淫, masturbation) on the back of listeners' letters she was sorting and putting under different rubrics, not to mention her discomfort voicing the term through the microphone to the public. Now she was feeling comfortable presiding over discussions about it.

Indeed, masturbation, one of the most frequently raised topics for the call-in show, was a good example of how "bodying the language" had changed the connotation of the sexual body. What was at stake when masturbation could not be talked about in the Maoist period was *yu* (欲, desire), which is considered harmful. Talking about masturbation is easier now because of the change of wording in the 1990s from shouyin (being lustful with hands) to *ziwei* (自慰, comfort by oneself, or self-consolation).[17] The term "shouyin" indicated an offense against the moral economy of preserving *jing*

(精, seminal essence), which was promoted by Chinese medicine as well as religious beliefs such as Daoism, because lust would do harm to life due to excessive expenditure of seminal essence.[18] In the Maoist period, the rise of *xiyi* (Western medicine) had relaxed the concern for the economy of seminal essence. However, in response to the political climate, the concern shifted to the harm it might cause to the collective body and the "Communist moral character" (Wang et al. 1956, 30–31). The economy of seminal essence was moralized into the economy of revolutionary, collective energy. This shift confirmed the continuity in the concern about the harm "lust" might cause to the moral character of the person and social institutions from imperial China to Republican China to socialist China.[19] Therefore, under socialism the purpose of preserving seminal essence was not to promote individual longevity, but collective unity.

Dr. Ma was among the first to use the phrase ziwei in place of shouyin in the mid-1990s. His argument was not too different from that of early sexologists in the West, when they fought inhibition from the Victorian period onward, although the reason for vigilance against masturbation then had been different. An interview with Dr. Ma, titled "Reverse the Verdict on Masturbation," published in a youth magazine in the mid-1990s, caused a tremendous response. Letters from readers poured into his office. In this interview, he relocated masturbation from the moral economy of seminal essence and the moral economy of revolutionary energy to the realm of medical normality.[20]

According to Foucault, the public crusade against masturbation in Western Europe played an important but different role in defining the emerging modern sexuality between the period from the late eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century and the period of the second half of the nineteenth century (the Victorian Period). During the crusade in the former period, the central tactic was to characterize masturbation as "somatization," as opposed to the moralization in the latter period. In the former period, the state expressed its central concern, through exaggeration, for the possible damage masturbation could do to the health of the young. In the latter period, public vigilance was directed to the nonproductive body of desire (Foucault 2003). The central argument on this transition was consistent with Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, in that in both periods the power that "repressed" sexual desire had its positive functions. What led to an excessive attention to masturbation in both periods was this "positive" power aimed at constituting "a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative" (Foucault 1990, 37), reflecting the con-

cern of the state about the early death of children as a result of illnesses or ill behaviors such as masturbation (Foucault 2003, 255).

In my view, Foucault's discussion of the "positive" nature of power makes more sense with regard to sexual normality in post-Mao China than his critique of repressive hypothesis does with regard to the moral vigilance in response to sexual desire in the Maoist period. Instead of producing "politically conservative" citizens, the moral economy of seminal essence in the Maoist period contributed to the production of selfless revolutionaries.[21] Lesley Hall (1992) and Thomas Laqueur (2003) discuss the struggle sexologists had later on in relaxing the worry about and moral vigilance in response to masturbation more than Foucault does. Dr. Ma shared the view of many Western sexologists and made consistent efforts to reverse the public perception of sexual desire from being negative to being positive in post-Mao China, as seen in the case of de-moralizing masturbation.

Dr. Ma's reinterpretation of masturbation had multiple implications. It may have represented a celebration of sexual desire. It may also have indicated the increasing influence of the biomedical perspective on masturbation and the use of the body. Regardless of what it signified, it sent a clear message: masturbation as well as individual desire could be comfortably talked about. This increasing comfort with sexual desire-related topics on the air signaled the emergence of "the realm of erotics," to use the phrase of Mankekar and Schein (this volume), in public. The emergence of such a realm in public was a powerful transformation of the public image of the erotic body, a transformation from an image of an erotic body that indicated lust and immorality in the Maoist period to an image that celebrated enjoyment of individual desire in the new era.

SPEAKING DESIRE

The flow between the virtual space of *Whispering Tonight* and the clinical actuality of sexual medicine was only one of the numerous new flows in post-Mao China. Those flows came up as a historical flight from tight restrictions on sexuality under Maoist socialism, a shift from the collective aspiration for being moral to individual desire to be normal. In this context, being normal means being able to face and articulate sexual desire. The call-in show increased the awareness of desire as well as the obstacles to realizing desire, and turned the awareness of desire into material flows—the flows of patients—into the clinic. Here desiring production was not so much to desire the release of primordial libidinal tension, as psychoanalysis would argue, as it was to create the body capable of desiring.

5.4. Dr. Ma sees a patient in the hospital.

Listening to the show could result in radical changes. Mr. Du, a fifty-year-old worker, complained about his inability to satisfy his wife because his wife wanted sex almost every day. Usually, questions from female listeners focused on reproduction. This time, Mr. Du came to the clinic and spoke explicitly for his wife about her sexual desire. He said:

> She wasn't like this before. I was born to a landlord's family before 1949 and was classified as having a bad family background in the era of class struggle under Mao. I thought I would never be able to get married. Indeed, I did not marry a woman until 1979, after the Cultural Revolution was over. My sister did the matchmaking, introducing my current wife in another county to me. I didn't like her right away, but I still married her. She was short, and came over to my village only with two suitcases. Now, our elder child is studying at a two-year college program, and our younger one is going to junior high. Our life is good. She can make some money by vending small items in the street. She was passive in the past, but now she was *tingchongde* [挺冲的, quite demanding or even aggressive]. We watch TV and listen to radio. We listen to Dr. Ma's radio show together. She wants it everyday.

Several layers of desiring and social production can be teased out here. First, the system of political class under the Maoist socialist state had prevented him from transgressing the boundary between revolutionary classes

and bad classes to marry a peasant woman. But after the system was invalidated, his desire opened up. Second, the call-in show shaped the desire of his wife so effectively that he was forced to match her desire to enjoy more sex. The social production—the new relationship with females due to the change in the state—was intertwined with the desiring production, producing the desire to desire more sex. More interestingly, under the influence of the virtual body, desiring production lost the balance because Mr. Du's desire could not match his wife's, so he now desired to restore it with high intensity, by seeking medication. His desire to marry, her desire to have more sex, and his desire to match hers testified to the effect of a virtual body capable of desiring, an overall change in the production of social relationships.

But desiring production is not just decoding (loosening up restrictions); it is also recoding (regulating it under new restrictions).[22] Take the issue of premature ejaculation (PE) as an example. The disorder was one of the most frequently raised questions. Premature ejaculation was part of a relatively recently created category of disorders, compared to other problems such as impotence, according to the ancient literature of Chinese medicine. There had been an intensified tendency to medicalize it as a disease in recent decades, during post-Mao reform, along with the increasing visibility of the phenomenon of impotence. However, under what condition and for what reason PE was medicalized as a disease is beyond an objective standard. For example, how long intercourse should last and how fast ejaculation after penetration should be considered "premature" had to do with gendered ideology. In the past, the limited discussion of PE had been largely male-centered and dismissive of female desire, in that it focused on the male's inability to fully enjoy sex and its damage to the masculine self-esteem. What was the implication of openly talking about PE now?

My interview shows three types of responses from women concerning this issue. The first was the lack of awareness of PE. The second was the woman's dissatisfaction with it but her tolerance of it anyway, either because she did not feel comfortable talking about her own desire by pointing out the man's PE, or did not want to "embarrass" him. The third one was the action of complaining about it and asking the man to improve. One woman shed tears after her husband's PE and asked her husband to use his fingers to satisfy her, but the man did not want to, because, as he said, using fingers made him less than a real man. Medicalizing PE entailed the introduction of new norms, a recoding of sexual desire, and required a clear definition of what "premature" means and what the norms were. Dr. Ma did not specify how long intercourse should last, but designated that it should be long

enough for the female to reach an orgasm. He also instructed that the male should perform longer foreplay and stimulate the female more in order to synchronize his ejaculation with her orgasm. Clearly, how PE is dealt with has a bearing on the gendered nature of desiring production regarding the justification of women's desire.

After listening to the show, some men started to pay attention to PE. Mr. Jiao, in his sixties, came to see Dr. Ma, saying that he did not know PE was not good for women until he had listened to *Whispering Tonight*. Mr. Zhao, in his fifties, said that he came to see the doctor for PE, even though his wife did not want him to seek treatment.

On all similar topics, the show promoted individual desire; that is, it decoded desire. At the same time, it recoded desire by drawing the boundary between normal and abnormal sexual desires. It regulated desire so that flows of desire had to stay within the boundary of heterosexual, respectable, middle-class norms.[23] However, this recoding differs greatly from the coding in the Maoist period, in that the public perception of individual desire has changed from negative to positive.

LISTENING AS REFASHIONING DESIRE

Broadcasting called attention to the body, through the bodily poise of listening, as "a somatic mode of attention." "Somatic mode of attention" refers to "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others," particularly in ritual healings (Csordas 1993).[24] In light of this notion, listening can be regarded as a way to attend to the body.

In Thomas Csordas's discussion, sensory modalities of religious healings consist of a sense of certainty, words (an intuitive expression of inspiration), and bodily touch between the healer and the afflicted. Such sensory modalities were seen in nonreligious healings (e.g., psychotherapy) as well. In Charles Hirschkind's study in Cairo, listening to the sermon recorded in the cassette engaged the body with the self-disciplinary ethics of Islam, helping the listener to achieve Islamic piety and self-improvement of personhood through "the sensory conditions (modes of attention and inattention)" (Hirschkind 2001, 641). Despite their different theoretical and ethnographic agendas, the somatic modes of attention and the sensory conditions (or a sensorium that features modes of attention and inattention) resonate with each other, highlighting the recipient's existence in his or her active attention to the body evoked by ritualistic actions.

The semiritualistic occasion of the talk show called attention to the body.

The listener was encouraged to zhuomo the body (to turn the body over in his or her mind) and to ask questions about the body. The technicality of the talk show—speaking softly, bodying the language, and creating the sense of certainty in the form of the authorities—aroused sensory imageries of the virtual, normal body to which a listener aspired. Here "sensory imagery," instead of referring to "an empiricist conception of imagination as abstract representation," is "a phenomenological conception of imagination as a feature of the bodily synthesis" (Csordas 1993, 148). It is neither only a mental image nor only an abstract concept, nor only a sense perception. It is neither a representation nor an abstraction. Instead, "sensory imagery," as a result of listening, emerges as a bodily comportment and becomes an affect that "efface[s] distinctions between the psychic, the cognitive, and the corporeal" (Mankekar and Schein, this volume). To many, paying attention to the body through listening became the entry to the virtual space of body-evoking and desire-refashioning.

A migrant worker in Beijing listening to a radio call-in show on sexual health was different from a Muslim taxi driver in Cairo listening to a sermon through cassettes. Changes in the mode of somatic attention in Catholic ritualistic healings differ from the change a listener in Beijing would undergo. One difference among others is that listening to radio in China had changed dramatically over the past three decades from an exposure only to the state's voice to "personal voices," to borrow Emily Honig and Gail Hershatter's term (1988). For a migrant worker, listening was more a relaxation than anything else. According to Ms. Sun, who went over all letters to the show on a weekly basis, "a radio set is a good *baner* [伴儿, a good friend that keeps one company] in the city."

Listening to the radio in the Maoist period was often a collective practice. One of the governmental techniques then was to establish a broadcasting station in every commune, however basic that station was. In a village, one could hear the ritualized broadcasting from the commune broadcasting station. Most of the time, though, the broadcasting station from the level of commune up to that of the county aired next to nothing of its own programming. They primarily transmitted "Beijing's voice," from Central People's Radio Station, in Beijing. This was a way for the state to synchronize different locations throughout the country and exercise "ideological indoctrination" (思想灌输) combined with administrative, financial, and military control.[25] Villagers listened to the voice from Beijing through the loudspeakers hung on a big post, a tree, or the wall. The listening behavior tended to be collectivist, unified, and public.

Now when migrating to the city, many migrant workers listened to radio in the evening in their dormitories or their rented rooms, while having meals or smoking cigarettes. Some listened to it after they got into their beds and were about to sleep. According to my investigation and Ms. Sun's knowledge, the three most common groups of listeners—migrant workers, soldiers, and students—shared something in the pattern of listening.[26] When the "whispering" began at 10:00 p.m., some held their radio sets or put them next to their pillows with or without their headphones on, listening to the conversations about the body, masturbation, desire disorders, and so on, while falling asleep. It became a ritualistic, private moment of relaxation, imagination, and sensorium formation.

As the unified listening to the state voice was replaced by diversified listening to the voices tailored to individualistic desire, there emerged room for negotiating oneself with the virtual body of normality. However, the virtual body of normality was already differentiated as soon as each self engaged its personal history with the voice. A listener tuned in to the show not as a "blank slate," but as a person with a history of desire. How did one's history prior to becoming a regular listener of the show influence the negotiation? To reiterate the Deleuzian distinction discussed previously, how does "differentiation" affect "differenciation"?

To refashion the question "Is there a history of sexuality?" (Halperin 1989), I ask: Does desire have a history? Deleuze and Guattari made a distinction between capitalist society and precapitalist society in desiring-production and shed light on the historicity of desire. They argue:

> Desiring-production also exists from the beginning: there is desiring-production from the moment there is social production and reproduction. But in a very precise sense it is true that pre-capitalist social machines are inherent in desire; they code it, they *code the flows* of desire. . . . As we shall see, capitalism is the only social machine that is constructed on the basis of *decoded flows*, substituting for intrinsic codes an axiomatic of abstraction quantities in the form of money. Capitalism therefore liberates the flows of desire, but under the social conditions that define its limits and the possibility of its own dissolution. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 139–40; emphasis added)

Desire has a history in the sense that regulations of desire changed over time and therefore changed the way desire formed and flowed over time. The coding of desire—deploying restrictions on it and regulating it tightly in the Maoist period—made it uncomfortable to talk about the sexual body and resulted in a lack of places to see a doctor for sexual desire-related problems.

5.5. Dr. Ma and two other nationally known urologists answering questions concerning male sexual dysfunction through a hotline on the program *The Television Clinic*, on Beijing Television Station. From right: Dr. Ma, Dr. Zhu, Dr. Guo, and the anchorperson.

In contrast, in post-Mao China, particularly since the 1990s, the decoding of desire—loosening the control—prompted the articulation of desire in public and the formation of the circuit of flows between *Whispering Tonight* and the clinic of sexual medicine.

Desire, according to Deleuze and Guattari, may or may not flow smoothly, depending on the combination of the mode of deterritorialization (less confined) and reterritorialization (confined).[27] How do different modes of desiring production and social production shape one's personal history of desire, and how is desire de-territorialized and re-territorialized at the same time? In what way was one's desire, in post-Mao China, made to flow on the one hand and rendered stagnant on the other? Moreover, how did this combination affect a person's sense of happiness, worth, and accomplishment as a desiring subject? Let us look at the case of Mr. Wang. He listened to *Whispering Tonight* and became a patient of the clinic of sexual medicine.

A History of Desire

FROM POVERTY OF DESIRE TO DESIRING IN POVERTY

Mr. Wang, a migrant worker from Anhui Province, came to the clinic with a desire to be normal. He was forty-four years old and an illiterate. He could not even read shop signs in the streets. Somebody in his village in Anhui

had taken him to Beijing three years before. He had worked as a janitor in a large shopping center in downtown Beijing. He did not make much money—about 500 yuan each month.

Mr. Wang heard *Whispering Tonight* and learned of the hospital. He decided to see the doctor for his recent concern about his potency. He found his way to the hospital and approached the registrar's window. The receptionist asked him which department he wanted to go to. He could not remember the name of the Department of Sexual Medicine, but pointed to his lower body, saying that he wanted to have his *xiashen* (下身, the lower body) examined. The term "xiashen" is a euphemism primarily used by people of lower classes and education, referring to sexual and reproductive organs. The receptionist sent him to Dr. Ma's consultation room.

He was still single at the age of forty-four. He described his life to me:

> I have an elder brother and a sister. My brother finished elementary school and is still a farmer. My sister and my brother all had their families. Because my family was poor, nobody ever had tried to be a go-between to find me a wife. My sister and brother used up my parents' *laoqian* [老錢, savings]. They all married our cousins.
>
> When I was five years old [1960], my parents died in the famine. In some families in our village, the whole family died. I was taken to an orphanage, and survived by having two spoonfuls of corn porridge every day. I started to look after buffalos when I was thirteen. When I was twenty, in 1976, I was separated from my brother. Later in the late 1970s I was allotted two mu of rice paddies and grew rice. I made several dozen yuan by selling rice after I paid the grain tax.
>
> There are not many girls in my village. Now they all went out to Beijing. I cannot afford to have a wife, because it costs several tens of thousands of yuan. Building a house costs twenty to thirty thousand yuan. There were several persons like me in each village.
>
> I first used my hands to get an erection when I was over twenty years old. I felt good when touching it. Now I do it every other day. In all my life I have seen women's body twice. The first was a woman in my village when I was in my twenties. We had sex and she gave me two or three yuan. The second time was in my thirties. It was similar to the first time. It did not feel too different from masturbation.
>
> Now in Beijing I got to know a woman also from Anhui. She has two children. Her older child is already thirteen. She works as a janitor too. A go-between put me in touch with her. She invited me to dinner twice. I felt good about her. I like her. She said that it was very tiring to be a janitor, and she could not make money

in the city. She asked her mother to look after her younger child and sent her elder one to her ex-brother-in-law's place. She suggested that I go with her back to her village.

We just started dating. She is considering living together and getting married. Now I am afraid of impotence. Sometimes at one or two o'clock in the morning I feel that the penis becomes hard, but I am not sure about it. I want to have an examination.

The shopping center Mr. Wang was working for had been a big department store for a long time before the 1990s. Now it was refashioned into one of the biggest shopping centers in Beijing, with dazzling inflections of different colors from the commodities and shiny glass cases on every floor. Apparently this world of consumption was not for him to relish, but only a place for him to survive the struggle every migrant worker was having.

Yet, there was something new in Mr. Wang's life. That he started to be concerned about his potency was a sign that an opportunity emerged in the struggle for survival. Chinese society, while being rapidly restratified, was providing some opportunities, partly because of the flow and the mobility between the village and the city. He was finding something he had never experienced—bodily gratification with good feelings. Different from the two instances of sexual intercourse a long time ago, or from masturbation, the recent gratification filled him with something new.

Dr. Ma had tried to reverse the negative implications of masturbation and had relocated masturbation from either the moral economy of seminal essence or the moral economy of revolutionary energy to the realm of normality. Even though this reversal was couched in the language of normality—*xingjiankang* (性健康, sexual health)—instead of in the language of "erotic desire" (Mankekar 2004), many men plagued by worry and the sense of guilt concerning masturbation were greatly relieved. After all, according to Dr. Ma, masturbation is nothing more than a safe way to release sexual tension. Yet, a conversation between Dr. Ma and a listener on the air called attention to the need to restrict masturbation again after its justification. A listener asked: "Since masturbation does not do harm to the body, should we do it whenever we want it?" Dr. Ma answered, "Masturbation can bring about gratification. But the gratification gained from masturbation is cheap. This is because during masturbation one does not need to make much effort to gain gratification. The gratification one gains from masturbation does not contribute much to one's spiritual development and does not have much meaning." This is an example of the "recoding of desire." Whether Mr. Wang

heard this on the air, or even whether this made sense to him at all, he was definitely more attracted to the gratification he gained from the significant "other" because he simply equated sexual intercourse without feelings with masturbation.

His life showed the contradictions of social life in post-Mao China. On the one hand, he was struggling to earn a living. Yet, having sexual gratification with feelings, in the form of marriage, was no longer an unreachable dream as it was in his village.[28] On the other hand, he was living in "relative poverty" amid an abundance of wealth and the rise of the new hierarchy. His desire could soon be doomed to disenchantment, however lacking he was in class consciousness, as the endless expansion of wealth and the flow of desire for consumption he witnessed at his worksite would push him to face the widening gap between those who can afford and those who cannot, between the affordable and the unaffordable. His girlfriend already wanted him to return to her village, not interested in the several hundred yuan he was making. The new class hierarchy and the lack of an effective system to check corruptions began to severely prevent economic gains and opportunities for consumption from being shared equally. The desire to consume and the desire to be normal may find their limits in the limited opportunities for the poor amid the huge expansion of wealth for the rich.

But looking back at the way he was talking to me, I remember that he was one of the few patients in the clinic during my entire fieldwork who looked happy and relaxed. The worry he had about his potency was eliminated by Dr. Ma in the examination. Mr. Wang had a good erection after he received an injection to measure the blood flow in his penis. Hearing Dr. Ma say that his erection was very good, he walked away with a smile on his face. He was a desiring subject, even though he was not much a subject of consumption yet, not only because he was not able to spend much, but also because he was not yet subject to the mentality of equating happiness with consumption. Did his worry-free psyche simply confirm the thesis regarding the false consciousness of the masses? Or did he fit into Wilhelm Reich's insight, rephrased by Deleuze and Guattari: "Desire can never be deceived. Interests can be deceived, unrecognized, or betrayed, but not desire. Whence Reich's cry: no the masses were not deceived. . . . It happens that one desires against one's own interests" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 257)?

My answer is neither. There is more in Mr. Wang's social world and history than the power of the two theories can cover. His desire to be normal was as much a constructed linguistic event as an experience of his retrieved and refashioned bodily longing. The normal body in the media virtuality

prompted him to come to the clinic, only to give a form to his long experience of sexual life as lack in the village. It was not so much the state repression as the "absolute poverty" that prevented him from being able to have a sexual life with feelings. Then what is the relationship between the desiring subject and the socioeconomic status? Do desiring subjects of different classes have the same take on desire itself, and on the desire to be normal?

CLASS DIFFERENTIATIONS AND A SMILE FOR LIFE

The desire to be normal may be blocked in many ways or may not flow with the same intensity and smoothness across different terrains. Class differences and class distinctions are two of the forces that render the flow of desire dwindling, broken, or stagnate. It was not new that class differences shape desire, and that one's place in the relationship of the production of both materials and signs, both the virtual and the actual, plays a role in deciding whether one's desire is recognized as realistic, legitimate, or realizable, and in forming the relationship one has with the object of consumption. In this sense, Mr. Wang's desire to be normal was disadvantaged, compared to that of a private entrepreneur, a government official, or a white-collar professional.

However, class differences do not determine the effect of the use of the body. The effect of the use of the body in relation to bodily enjoyment is not predetermined by class differences. For example, according to my field investigation, impotence as a disease is not correlated with socioeconomic status.[29] It is only when it comes down to managing impotence that socioeconomic status matters much. An entrepreneur is able to consume Viagra at will, whereas five pills of Viagra would cost Mr. Wang the whole of his monthly salary. The entrepreneur's desire to be normal is made more flowing and more legitimate than Mr. Wang's by the relationship of production. But overall, the complex etiological relationship between impotence and socioeconomic status makes a classic Marxist analysis of production and alienation less than accurate in delineating the complex effect of the participation of economic agents in making currents, subcurrents, or countercurrents of desire. In sum, if socioeconomic status is not an important index of one's potency, or one's probability to develop the condition of impotence, it is an index of the power one may have in medicalization and the range of choices one may have for medication. This would make a difference in how the normal body of sexual desire in the media is virtuality actualized in the clinic and in everyday life.

I want once again to emphasize the historicity of the body of Mr. Wang,

particularly because he lived through the two eras. The absolute poverty under the "egalitarian relationship of production" of Maoist socialism, which many studies have shown to be only a partial truth, filled Mr. Wang's body with want and wish that could not be satisfied. His vulnerability in that era was the vulnerability of bare life.[30] When thirty million people, including Mr. Wang's parents, died of starvation within three years (1959–61) because of the disastrous policies of the state, and when many people ended up eating bark and clay, where was the place of sexual desire, as life itself was perishing?[31] Surviving overrides desiring, in that it is the most fundamental and ultimate desire. Therefore, for Mr. Wang, the historicity of the body should not be obscured by the romanticized notion of Maoist socialism, particularly its practices with life.[32] At least, when class consciousness is needed in guiding our critique of neoliberalism under postsocialism, I am sure that for Mr. Wang, Maoist socialism was not an alternative.[33] The historicity of desire presents limits to directing the search for a better society back to Maoist socialism. The deprivation of desire in absolute poverty in the time when villagers died of famine preceded the relative poverty Mr. Wang was suffering in the city now. In his memory, life was lost. I am not sure Mr. Wang would want to go back to that village.

THE LIMITS OF DESIRING PRODUCTION

Unlike Mr. Wang, a number of men found themselves walking away without solutions and suggestions from the doctor about what to do after the medication could not help them regain potency. For example, some impotence patients, after trying everything, including Viagra, or Viagra combined with herbal medicine, still could not get an erection good enough to penetrate a female. Flows of desire seemed to come to a dead end. Dr. Ma was reticent about this dead end. Did desiring production also come to a dead end?[34] In practice, some patients explored alternative ways to satisfy themselves and their female partners, by increasing foreplay, utilizing a variety of techniques of sexual intimacy, including nonphallocentric intimacy, lesbian eroticism in combination with Viagra or herbal medicine, or practicing an assemblage of all of the above. Coming from this new perspective, eroticism beyond the fixed erogenous zones has focused instead on the intensity and pervasiveness of desire to transgress the boundaries of sexual normalcy, constituting something like "the Body without organs" in Deleuzian terms (Deleuze and Guattari 1983).

In her study based on interviews with impotence patients and their sexual partners, Annie Potts (2004) discovered how they tried to have nonphallo-

centric erotic pleasure even in the face of the failure of Viagra. She calls the nonphallocentric erotic "extra-Viagra eroticism." The nonphallocentric means for gaining sexual pleasure (touching, rubbing, nonpenetration orgasms, etc.) emerged to destabilize the ideological framework of Viagra, as well as the hegemonic normative mode of sexuality, masculinity, heterosexism, and orgasm-oriented and vagina-penetration-centered coitus. Nonphallocentric eroticism resonates with the notion of "the Body without organs," as the phrase refers to the intensity of desire and its pervasiveness in morphology, countering the repressive, confined triangle of the Oedipus complex and castration complex in early psychoanalysis. Moreover, as the actualization of the virtuality is differenciation, a genuine creation, "the Body-without-organs" type of sexual practice is nothing short of a genuine creation.

Thus, flows of desire went beyond the narrowly defined erogenous zones and became diffused with the whole body, emphasizing the diffused intensity of desire and showing a potential to reshape the current mode of desiring production in the circuit of *Whispering Tonight* and sexual medicine into genuine creation. Although there were bodily limits to restoring erections and potency among a number of impotent men, there seemed no limit to developing desire-centered subjectivity for anyone.

At the same time, different types of actualization of the virtual imagery of the normal body were emerging. Dr. Cao, a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, talked about desire in a different way on the air. For example, he emphasized the function of cultivating life through much regulated sex, while cautioning against masturbation. Potency, in the understanding of many doctors of Chinese medicine and ordinary folks, was not just the ability to get an erection, but a vitality of the whole body.[35] Realizing desire through alternative ways and enhancing potency through the cultivation of life make desiring production a more complex, contingent, and creative process than a unified, fixed one, a differenciation again. Desiring production seemed to have, again, been subject to the "determinate conditions" of the new era. They are not the repression from the state, but the revival of the traditionally coded body, or the recoded desire. To understand how this recoding, a seeming countercurrent to the decoding of desire, could facilitate the production of desire, we need to ask: What is desiring production up to? What, indeed, is desire?

Inconclusion: From Desire to Pleasure

When desire is everything that flows and decodes along the lines of flight, when it is always in the state of becoming, we may not need to ask what desire is (Deleuze and Guattari 1997, 188). We are only concerned about what desire does. But, this question becomes important when we want to understand the historicity of desire; that is, when we look at desire not only in capitalist society but also in socialist society, when we look at it in the transformation of the latter, conceived of by many as largely in the format of the former, and when we want to understand the alternatives to normal ways of realizing desire, I find the discussion drawn toward the notion of "pleasure."

Foucault and Deleuze had an intellectual conversation comparing desire with pleasure. According to Deleuze, Foucault said that what he calls pleasure is perhaps what Deleuze calls desire. But Foucault needs a word other than desire, because he could not keep himself from thinking or living that desire = lack as in psychoanalysis (Deleuze 1997, 189). Foucault made it very clear that pleasure is so central and yet so enigmatic that we should take it seriously. Foucault wrote, "I think that pleasure is a very difficult behavior. It's not as simple as that to enjoy one's self. . . . I always have the feeling that I do not feel the pleasure, the complete total pleasure, and for me, it's related to death" (Foucault 1997, 129). Despite Deleuze's constant clarification that desire is not a lack at all and his preference for desire over pleasure, he nonetheless calls "pleasure" "the only means for a person or a subject to 'find itself again' in a process that surpasses it," in "a re-territorialization" (Deleuze 1997, 190). Reterritorialization, in the Deleuzian sense, means a countermove to deterritorialization, a rechanneling of flows in whatever form—state machine, biopower, or the revival of the cautious use of the body in the logic of the cultivation of life, for that matter.

Despite desire's being constrained in reterritorialization, Foucault brings the constraint into perspective, which Deleuze calls "find[ing] itself again." Suppose that the subject of desire is first deterritorialized and gets "lost" in its flight and its pervasiveness at large in defining social life, every social event, and even general sociality. In contrast, pleasure means that the subject of desire finds itself again in the terrain of immanence, the intensity of which only death can match. In light of the process of the actualization of the virtual, a question arises: Does Mr. Wang have any pleasure?

Answering this question may require an economy of desire combined with an analytics of pleasure. In analyzing the movie *Zhaole* (找乐, Looking for fun), Judith Farquhar (1999) makes the point that ordinary people ex-

plore answers in the face of the rapidly commercialized society under post-socialism. Reframing the question of pleasure in a seemingly lighthearted way, one asks: Has Mr. Wang had fun yet? The question arises out of concerns about the dazzling changes: the more commercialized social life testifies to the increasing dominance of instrumental rationality, material gains have become the sole indicator of one's worth in the eyes of many people, and psychiatrists have revealed that the pressure to make more money has dramatically made vulnerable those who had not been vulnerable to the sense of worthlessness symptomatic of many mental disorders.[36] This is a question about what is an ideal and methodic life, a question of being. Many traditions (Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, etc.) have been undergoing a revival and reconstruction in today's China, contributing to the exploration of such an ideal (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Having fun, understood in a lighthearted way, means having moments of *zideqile* (自得其樂, one gains enjoyment in a methodic way without being motivated to satisfy any external standard or judgment) in everyday life; understood in a more serious way, it may mean an accumulation of the potentials for pleasure as small and approachable as everyday fun, toward what Foucault calls "the complete total pleasure."[37]

It is beyond this chapter to offer a comprehensive review of the debate about "the complete total pleasure." By differentiating desire from pleasure, I merely point out the limits of desiring production in post-Mao China. The satisfaction of desire may not inevitably lead to pleasure, because pleasure may lie outside any immediate actuality.

Overall, the rise of individual desire in post-Mao China, in contrast to the dominant aspiration for collective moralism in the Maoist period, constituted the flows and was intensified by the flows between the media and the clinic. An examination of the flows from the perspective of desiring production exposed a structural flaw in both periods—the invalidation of individual desire under Maoist socialism, and the unequal distribution of opportunities for realizing desire in post-Mao China, pointing to the hope of a better condition for desiring production. Ultimately, the limits to desiring production raises the question about whether or not the realization of desire would lead to pleasure. This is the ethical question any effort to further the perspective of desiring production and social production must address.

Notes

1. On the change in the media, see Shirk's (2010) study. On an overall effect of privatization, see the work of Zhang and Ong (2008).

2. My observation focused on those who were drawn into this "circuit." Prominent in this circuit was the increase in the patient visits for treatment for impotence. On the implications of such an increase, see Zhang's (2007a) study.

3. The term "circuit" refers to the trajectory of the flows consisting of patients and listeners, just like the trajectory of the flows of money (e.g., investing and consuming, spending and saving, purchasing and selling, deposing and withdrawing), which are often circular. A media circuit is similar to "a commercial circuit" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 360).

4. With the notion of the simulacrum, Baudrillard destabilized the distinctions between the real and the unreal, between the original and the copy, between the authentic and the inauthentic, radically altering modern sensibility into a postmodern subjectivity that transpires in the fragmented, fluid, incoherent production of signs and desires (Baudrillard 1990).

5. Medicalization is commonly understood as homogenization instead of differenciation, so here the actualization of the virtual body between the media virtuality and the medical actuality does not seem to fit into "differenciation." Yet, inspired by Bergson, Deleuze replaces the notion of transcendental being with the notion of the virtual being. The virtual being is actualized in the coexistence of past and present constituted through memory, and is understood as differenciation, a genuine creation (Deleuze 2004, 22–31). Similarly, in this context the virtual being is presented through the coexistence of the past and present, that is, through a memory of the inadequate body against the normal body. In the sense that this virtual being became a problem to be solved, the virtual is actualized anew, a differenciation.

6. Critically benefiting from Kant and Marx and reversing one of the most important principles of psychoanalysis concerning desire as indicating "lack," Deleuze and Guattari propose "desiring production" as a core content of their schizoanalysis of capitalism. According to Judith Butler, the transition from the coding of desire to the decoding of desire in their schizoanalysis reveals the Hegelian binary template as well (Butler 1999).

7. The typical expression of the concern about purifying one's soul in the Maoist period was to "raise the level of ideological and political conscientiousness" (提高思想政治覺悟).

8. See the work of Lock and Nguyen (2010) for discussion of medicalization, and Clarke et al. (2010) for the discussion of biomedicalization.

9. "The consumer revolution," a theme of the edited volume of that title by Deborah Davis (2000), characterizes the significance of the change from Maoist socialism to the post-Mao consumer society in progressive terms. As I will discuss later, a strong sense of breaking away from the state-ordered, centralized everyday life justified this characterization (Yan 2010). As the members of the society started to be restratified

economically, more and more attention has been paid to the unequal distribution of opportunity, capital, and wealth in consumption, particularly in the late 1990s and the 2000s (Anagnost 2007; X. Liu 2009; Pun 2003). But the latter studies do not cancel out the contribution of the former studies (Davis 2005). See also Zhang's (2010) study for an effort to address the two sides of the issue.

10. Judith Farquhar made the point in her comments on the survey conducted by Liu Dalin et al. on sexual behaviors (Farquhar 2002). In her view, the Chinese sex-education literature "is an attempt to impose a relatively alien way of organizing intimate experience and private relationship in the name of modernity and (arguably) in the service of a consumer economy" (Farquhar 2002, 232).

11. Similar "openness" can be seen in other places remote from Beijing. Yunxiang Yan documented erotic scenes in a rural area in Heilongjiang (Yan 2003, 67). He attributes the difference in sexual behaviors to the difference between the elite and commoners, and between urban areas and rural areas.

12. Those texts, known as continuations of the tradition established by the Mawangdui scripture in the Han Period (206 BCE to 220 CE) (Harper 1998), were part of the erotica that delineates the use of sex largely in the tradition of the Daoist bedchamber arts aiming for the cultivation of life. The emphasis on sexual pleasure and sexual cultivation are equally prominent. As for the tradition of bedchamber arts, see the work of Furth (1994), Hu and Lü (2004), J. Li (2000), L. Li (2006), Liao (1994), Liu (1999), van Gulik (1974), and Wile (1992).

13. Kathleen Erwin's (2000) work on radio call-in shows of this type in Shanghai in the mid-1990s showed its popularity.

14. In Veena Das's (1997, 70) view, Wittgenstein renders lively the effect of the sensations of the body in the use of language, which is the "bodying forth of words." In the bodying forth of words, language gains a power it might otherwise not be able to have. Here I highlight the phenomenological plethora of references in the show, to the body, body parts, organs, fluids, skin, limbs, and so on. These references formed the imaginaries of the virtual, normal body that is forthcoming in and between words.

15. Strengthening the individual body for the cause of nationalism was a common appeal (Brownell 1995).

16. The rise of qigong (N. Chen 2003) and yangsheng (the cultivation of life) (Farquhar and Zhang 2005) in the post-Mao era confirms such a trend.

17. See Evans's (1997) study of this change.

18. Literature on the economy of seminal essence is abundant.

19. Concerns about the moral economy of seminal essence dominated the literature of Chinese medicine and Daoist scriptures. As regulations and punishment against illicit sex in late imperial China had tightened (Sommer 2000), the public moral discourse put more emphasis on how to prevent lust and desire from corrupting the moral character of the person, ruining one's honor and rank and damaging the moral standard of the family and clan, than on how it would ruin one's life and reproduction (Xu 1996). In the Republican Period, however, the concern about the harm masturbation could do was elevated from the familial body to the racialized Han body (see Zhang 2007a).

20. Lisa Rofel's (2007a) timely study examines how the rising desire in post-Mao China, particularly in the 1990s, had been forming a "desiring China." I share the perspective, but put more emphasis than Rofel does on how desire had a history of being repressed. She recognizes collective passion as being much promoted instead of being repressed under Maoist socialism. My point is that the promoting of collective passion (e.g., passion for being a moral person) went hand in hand with the sublimation and repression of the desire of the individual.

21. On this contrast, see Zhang's (2005) study.

22. The notions of "coding" and "decoding," as part of Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalytics are different from the terms' common usage in semiotics and communication studies (as in, "put it into a code" and "decipher the coded message"). Deleuze and Guattari refer to the unsmoothness of flows as coding, whereas they refer to the smoothness of flows as decoding.

23. The official framework of sexual health has changed over time, from a more "conservative" one to a less "conservative" one, in Dr. Ma's view. For example, the state's tolerance of same-sex romance and relationships has increased over the past decade, a change that can be seen in news coverage. For a discussion of same-sex love in China, see Zhang's (2011a) study and the work of Engebretsen (2009), Y. Li (2006), and Rofel (2007a). Dr. Ma's use of the label "conservatism" was by and large consistent with the label as it was used in the debate on sex education in the United States (Irvine 2001).

24. Many healing rituals focused on changing the locus of the self through changing the sensory of the body, and had an effect of calming down the previously disturbed mentality. *Whispering Tonight* was a semiritualistic interaction, loosely speaking. Moreover, it often sent the messages that "stir up," instead of calming down, desire.

25. "Ideological indoctrination" was not a negative term in the Maoist period, in that it was believed that capitalist ideas could arise spontaneously, whereas socialist ideas had to be indoctrinated.

26. It might be true that radio listening as a social behavior has been associated more with lower classes as shown in the studies of radio culture in other societies (Spitulnik 2001).

27. From a Deleuzian perspective, desire is not romantic feelings, passion, love, or affection. Nor is it libido. It is a construction of and experience with an aggregate, a whole context, and an assemblage. It involves multiple factors, including "state of things," style, "delirium" (a complex state of being free from refrain, but not becoming insane), and a territory (in relation to which desire is either deterritorializing and reterritorialized) (Deleuze 1988).

28. Lévi-Strauss once discussed old bachelors and their miserable position in the community. He attributed the cultural milieus tolerant of celibacy in some societies to the relatively easy production of food, or to the structural consequence of strict exogamy (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 39–41). However, Mr. Wang was among those who could not afford to get married due to poverty, a phenomenon that had more to do with the social structure than with cultural customs.

29. Some indirect links between impotence and socioeconomic status can be inferred.

Diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, depression, and so on, are among the most prominent risk factors associated with impotence. If those diseases are associated with socioeconomic status, then that association provides indirect links between impotence and socioeconomic status. But even if the links between those diseases and impotence can be established in epidemiological studies, it is far from clear how valid it is to infer the effect of socioeconomic status on impotence.

30. "Bare life," in Giorgio Agamben's (1998) terms, means a life that can be killed but cannot be sacrificed. It is the biological existence without legal, legitimate protection. A person who had a life like Mr. Wang's did not exactly have a life without any legal rights and could not be subject to death without any justification. But in the situation of the Great Famine, from 1959 to 1961, the citizenship of people like Mr. Wang's parents became so feeble that they died like insects. In this sense, I call the life of his parents as well as his a "bare life."

31. Determining how many died in the Great Famine has been the object of many studies. New materials have kept coming out. On the Great Famine in general, see the work of Cao (2005), Dikötter (2010), R. Li (1998), B. Liao (2005), Manning and Wemheuer (2011), Mueggler (2001), Song and Ding (2009), Thaxton (2008), Dali Yang (1996), and Zhang (2011c).

32. For a discussion of the change in the governance of life from Mao to post-Mao and its moral implications, see the work of Zhang (2011b); and Zhang, Kleinman, and Tu (2011).

33. For an analysis of inequality in the Maoist period and during post-Mao reform, see Whyte's (2010) study.

34. My fieldwork shows that prosthetic surgery and penile venoligation are two alternatives in the event of the failure of anti-impotence drugs. For example, in Taiwan, venoligation surgery still attracted patients in the "Viagra era."

35. For a discussion of different understandings of potency, see Zhang's (2007b) study.

36. Kleinman et al. (2011) offer an elaborated discussion of the contradictory, moral implications of human existence in China today, including conflicting selves, changing moral practices, and the shifting sense of adequacy in life.

37. Foucault made a distinction between "enjoying one's self" and "the complete total pleasure," and considered it very difficult to achieve the latter. He did not say whether or not the latter can be achieved through the former. In some practices of Chinese religion, it is achievable. Acknowledging the complete total pleasure as an objective of life under modernity for many, I speculate on the religiously achievable pleasure. The two different types of flows—flows of desire and flows of beliefs (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 219)—complicate the issue of pleasure. The total pleasure might not be achievable through enjoying oneself immersed in the flows of desire, but is achievable through the flows of embodied beliefs. Obviously, a thorough discussion of the difference and relationship between the two types of flows is left open-ended here.

[6] PURNIMA MANKEKAR

DANGEROUS DESIRES

Erotics, Public Culture, and Identity in Late Twentieth-Century India

During the early 1990s, the Indian public sphere witnessed a proliferation of representations of erotics. Some of the erotic (re)charging of the public has been attributed to the expansion of transnational public culture, in particular to the images, texts, and commodities flooding India after the liberalization of the economy. It has also been attributed to the advent of transnational satellite television—and here I refer not only to "imported" shows such as *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Santa Barbara* but, more important, to soap operas, films, and talk shows produced specifically for viewers in India and its diasporas and beamed via transnational satellite networks like STAR (Satellite Television for the Asian Region), Sony Entertainment Television, and Zee TV.[1] In this chapter, I analyze the eroticization of two domains of public culture that represent contemporary manifestations of globalization: the discourses and desires surrounding commodities, and television programs telecast on transnational television. My objective is to examine the place of erotics in the reconfiguration of gender, family, class, and nation, occurring in metropolitan centers like New Delhi in late twentieth-century India.[2]

I learned through my ethnographic research to conceive of erotics as sexualized longings and pleasures constructed at the intersection of the psychic and the structural. Because the erotic is frequently "clandestine and covert" (Sunder Rajan 1999a, 7), it is not always decipherable through hermeneutic interpretations of discourse, language, or the everyday practices of individuals (compare Zavella 1997). At the same time, I want to challenge the assumption that the erotic might be "purely" instinctive or primordial or lie

outside the domain of the *socius* (see also Manderson and Jolly [1997], especially pages 2–5 and 13). While doing fieldwork, I glimpsed just how deeply media texts were embedded in the subjectivities, imaginaries, and fantasies of my informants. I also learned that my informants *inhabited* these texts in profound and intimate ways. I quickly realized that I would have to go beyond the verbal, the discursive, and the visible if I was to understand how media inflected the yearnings, anxieties, and desires of my informants.

My sense of inadequacy was compounded by the fact that I was interested in tracing the elusive, yet powerful, relationship between media, fantasy, and the erotic. Shortly after commencing my research, I realized that a study of erotics presented unique challenges to my ethnographic practice, in part because of the difficulties in talking about these topics with lower-middle-class and working-class women in urban India.[3] While interviews and participation-observation taught me a great deal about how media shaped my informants' social relationships and everyday practices, I felt I was barely scratching the surface: the realm of the erotic remained elusive—or, at least, opaque. I became acutely sensitive to the importance of respecting the silences, hesitations, and discursive detours that saturated our conversations. For one, my informants tended to discuss sex and, in particular, erotics in the idiom of power as much as pleasure, and, more important, they would do so through metaphors, tropes, and gestures. We thus had to learn to glean each other's thoughts and feelings indirectly rather than solicit or express them directly.[4] For instance, many women I spoke with expressed their erotic longing via their yearnings for certain commodities. Thus, talking about a particular sari or lipstick would enable a young woman to express her dreams and anxieties regarding her forthcoming marriage. In such cases, erotic desire was articulated through the trope of the commodity. On other occasions, my informants expressed their attitudes, feelings, and, very occasionally, their experiences of sex and erotics while discussing television programs. Here, our discussions were veiled and took the surreptitious form of commentaries on what they saw on television. I deemed it neither ethical nor culturally appropriate to interrogate my lower-middle-class and working-class informants about their attitudes toward sex or, worse, their sexual practices; my concern was not with how the proliferation of erotics in the public sphere has affected the sex lives of people in late twentieth-century India. Instead, my analysis of the cultural significance of erotics is based on ethnographically refracted practices of analyzing the intertextual field in which my informants live and love.

Mary E. John has argued that, in late twentieth-century India, trans-

national media played "a disproportionate role in organising our visual field, and, in the present context, is itself one of the hallmarks of globalisation" (1998, 372). While transnational media were certainly hallmarks of contemporary forms of globalization, they led to the dissolution neither of the nation-state nor of nationalist structures of feeling. On the contrary, transnational media participated in the reconfiguration of national identity. Furthermore, rather than see erotic desire in opposition to nationalist affect (compare Mankekar 1999), I am interested in tracing the relationship between the two. How did nationalist belonging and notions of what it means to be Indian shape the ways in which erotic desire was constituted? Conversely, how did new representations of the erotic mediate how "Indian culture" was reconfigured? In addition to examining the intersection of representations of the erotic with discourses of caste, class, and family, I am concerned with tracing how erotic longing articulates with nationalist belonging, and how these apparently disparate structures of feeling constitute the subject of consumption in late twentieth-century India.

Genealogies of the Erotic in India

This chapter militates against the notion that transnational media swept into India to *introduce* images and discourses of the erotic. Indeed, by tracing the (re)eroticization of the public sphere in India, the ensuing discussion also serves to interrogate Eurocentric and universalistic notions of erotics (compare Manderson and Jolly 1997, 12, 22).[5] Diverse genealogies of the erotic have always coexisted in Indian public cultures.[6] In listing these genealogies, however, I want to insert the following caveats. For one, my delineation of previously existing genealogies is based entirely on textual sources and does not take into account vernacular or oral traditions. These texts are largely masculinist and, in the case of Sanskrit sources, upper caste. In the case of sources affiliated with Hindu traditions, we also run the risk of being complicit with Orientalist and/or Hindu nationalist attempts to hark back to a classical Sanskritic past, in an effort to seek the "roots" of contemporary cultural phenomena. In fact, multiple traditions exist, including "Indo-Islamic" traditions of representations of erotics. My objective in the following partial genealogy is simply to underscore that late twentieth-century representations of erotics did not emerge in a cultural or discursive vacuum and that, in all probability, they resonated with older, perhaps residual (R. Williams 1977), conventions of erotics.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to compare recent representations of erotics with premodern ones. Nevertheless, late twentieth-century repre-

sentations need to be situated vis-à-vis heterogeneous traditions of erotics in the premodern past. These include the *Kamasutra* (said to have been written between the second and fourth centuries CE), which was a didactic text that conceived of erotics as part of a range of pleasures, including those offered by art, dance, and poetry.[7] Erotics also appeared as an aesthetic category in Bharata's *Natyashastra*, in the work of Abhinavagupta (in the eleventh century), in Sanskrit poetry such as Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhava*, the twelfth-century poem *Gitagovinda*, by Jayadeva, Tamil *akam* poetry, and in medieval *bhakti* poetry dedicated to Krishna.[8] Many bhakti poems were in local languages (rather than in Sanskrit) and continue to be influential in contemporary, Hindu popular culture. Indo-Islamic *sufi* traditions incorporated the erotic into aesthetic conventions, expressing the mystical union of the devout with the Divine Beloved (see Schimmel 1975, especially pages 287–89). Among Indo-Islamic and Urdu performative traditions, the most influential in contemporary popular culture is the *ghazal* (see Dwyer 2000).[9]

In the modern conjuncture, the most ubiquitous and influential form of popular culture in India and its diasporas is popular film. Popular music, circulated in audio cassettes and CDs, or consumed as music videos on television, draws largely on film music. Film and television have developed a symbiotic relationship, and many televisual representations of erotics—whether in MTV-style music programs or television serials—draw on the representational strategies and narrative conventions of popular film. Yet, in late twentieth-century India, televisual representations of erotics diverged significantly from those in popular film. The past few decades have also witnessed the flowering of heterogeneous print media, ranging from novels, magazines, and pamphlets in English and regional languages to "Indianized" versions of U.S.-based magazines like *Cosmopolitan*. Since the early 1990s, a large proportion of these media have focused centrally on intimate relationships and contain representations of the erotic. These media use a range of aesthetic codes to represent the erotic, and many juxtapose transnational discourses with more familiar "Indian" ones. Thus, for instance, a copy of the Indianized *Cosmopolitan* might include excerpts from the *Kamasutra* alongside articles on safe sex and dating. In general, contemporary representations of erotics in hegemonic popular culture are predominantly heterosexist in orientation, thus inscribing heterosexual erotic desire as normative, if not normal.[10] This does not, of course, preclude readings or interpretations of these representations in terms of homoerotic desire, which might sometimes lie just beneath their surfaces (Gopinath 2005).

There is no unitary or singular "Indian" discourse on erotics. At the close of the twentieth century, discourses of the erotic proliferating in the Indian public sphere drew upon some of these preexisting genealogies or existed in uneasy tension with them. At the same time, it is crucial to note that prior genealogies of the erotic have not survived unchanged through the ages. As part of larger discursive formations, they are as contingent and contested as other discourses and have been appropriated and reconstituted at different historical moments. For instance, contemporary conflations of middle-class respectability with the sexual modesty of women have been influenced by colonial and Victorian discourses of gender and domesticity (see Bannerjee 1989; Chatterjee 1993; Tharu 1989). Hence, instead of either harking back to a static tradition of "Indian erotics" or assuming that transnational mass media caused the Westernization or homogenization of "local" discourses of the erotic, we might consider how local cultural forms are produced in articulation with the translocal, and also how the transnational itself is reconfigured as it intersects with the local or, indeed, the national (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a).

Given that there are such rich and heterogeneous genealogies of the erotic in India, what is so notable about recent representations? First, recent representations of the erotic are imbricated with the feverish commodity consumption precipitated by the expansion of mass culture, the liberalization of the Indian economy, and the proliferation of globalized capital. Second, the production, circulation, and consumption of these representations occur in a transnational, intertextual field. Furthermore, representations of the erotic in postcolonial India frequently provoke discourses of the defense of "Indian" or national culture. Notwithstanding older traditions of erotics, contemporary representations are often associated with Westernization and are, therefore, deemed transgressive. Nowhere is this association stronger than with reference to women's erotic desire.

In what follows, I focus on the relationship between erotics and the consumption of commodities and texts. Following Appadurai (1996), I conceive of consumption as a set of (primarily) imaginative practices, which, in the historical context in which my research was based, were profoundly mediated by transnational circuits of images, texts, and commodities. I begin by examining how the yearning for erotic pleasure is conjoined with the yearning for commodities. Next, I situate these yearnings in an intertextual field by analyzing televisual representations of erotics and viewers' responses to them. Finally, I point to how representations of erotics, and some viewers'

responses to them, provide us with a perspective on not only the cultural and social changes occurring in India at the close of the twentieth century but, more broadly, on redefinitions of "Indian culture."

Dangerous Desires

I first learned of the conjunction between erotic desire and the desire to consume, what I will call commodity affect, through my fieldwork in India.[11] Commodity affect refers to the range of affective regimes evoked and constructed by the desire for commodities, some of which are suffused with erotics. Several observers have pointed to the eroticization of representations of commodities; hence, there is nothing new about the argument that desire is cathected with commodities. Commodity affect subsumes the desire to consume a particular commodity, the desire to acquire it, to the desire to display it. More importantly, desire in commodity affect pertains not just to the pleasure of acquiring a commodity, but also to the pleasures of gazing upon it—what Louisa Schein terms browsing the commodity space (1999a; on the relationship between desire and affect, see Deleuze 1997). As several informants suggested to me, gazing at commodities in advertisements and in shops provided them with "a window on the world": it introduced them to the lives and worlds of people removed from them in terms of class, region, and nation. Commodities and their representations created a visual field that enabled forms of imaginative travel, so that a young woman in a small town in northern India was able to imagine the life of her friend in Bombay. Similarly, a young man who had never traveled outside India but was an avid viewer of television ads could speak eloquently of youth culture in the United States. But beyond gazing upon commodities, it was the yearning for commodities that appeared laced with erotics. Significantly, the lower-middle-class and working-class women I worked with could not afford to purchase most of the commodities they so lovingly viewed in ads and in shop windows. Their yearning for these commodities was itself a source of pleasure, a pleasure not dissimilar to erotic yearning.

The eroticization of the commodity needs to be placed in the larger context of commodity aesthetics. As Wolfgang Fritz Haug points out, "Modern commodity production, as it increasingly incorporates the aesthetic dimension (in, for example, advertising or contemporary design), develops a discourse which connects with and transforms the 'sensual awareness' of modern consumer society. In so doing, it plays, with increasing complexity, across the ambiguities of the 'real' and the 'fantastic'" (1986, 4). Commodity aesthetics shape not only our sense of visuality but also our "sensual under-

standing" of the material world (Haug 1986, 8).[12] Commodity aesthetics shape our ideas of what might be pleasurable to our senses in terms of the exchange-value of the commodity so as to "stimulate in the onlooker the desire to possess and the impulse to buy" (1986, 8). In addition, commodities might themselves be cathected with libidinal desire, such that "a whole range of commodities can be seen casting flirtatious glances at the buyers, in an exact imitation of or even surpassing the buyers' own glances, which they use in courting their human objects of affection" (1986, 19). Thus, even though a majority of men and women I worked with could not always afford to buy all the commodities they so ardently desired, they were, nevertheless, interpellated by commodity aesthetics in terms of their desire to desire them, gaze upon them, and consume them.[13]

Erotics mediate a range of affects and fantasies surrounding commodities. Let me now describe how one woman represented her daughter-in-law's desires for commodities. This woman's discourses of commodity desire were mediated by her relationship to her daughter-in-law and, therefore, by their respective positions in the politics of the family. They were also mediated by their caste and class positions and, thus, needed to be situated in a broader sociohistorical context. The struggles, individual as well as collective, to realign caste and class hegemony became extremely volatile after conflicts erupted around the ill-fated Mandal Commission Bill of 1990. The Mandal Commission Bill was introduced by the political regime then in power to create quotas for lower castes and "backward" castes in government institutions, but was stalled after it was violently resisted by upper castes and middle castes all over India. The consumption of commodities acquired a particularly potent significance in this explosive context: the possibility of acquiring consumer goods presented some lower-caste individuals and families with potential access to a middle-class lifestyle. Although acquiring such a lifestyle did not, by any means, enable them to transcend their caste position, to a limited extent it enabled an apparent realignment of caste and class. For Omvati's family, and many others like it, the consumption of commodities became an especially fraught marker of their struggles for upward mobility.

Omvati was in her mid-fifties when I first interviewed her in 1992, and hers was one of the few lower-caste households in their neighborhood. She lived with her son Satish, her daughter-in-law Radha, and their four-year-old son, Sonu. Satish worked as a clerk in a government office, and Radha was employed as a salesperson in a government-run fabric store. Omvati was extremely proud that her son was the first in their extended family to have

received a college degree and, more important, to hold a government job. Radha also had a college degree, but Omvati's feelings about her were mediated by her ambivalence toward the fact that she was city-bred and "modern." For Omvati, as much as for Radha, modernity was indexed not only by Radha's college education but, equally, by her fashionable clothes. But while Radha embraced what she perceived as the accoutrements of modernity, Omvati was very anxious about some of the slow, but inexorable, changes she saw around her, especially as they affected her position in her family. The entire family was acutely conscious of two harsh social facts: one, that their struggles to achieve middle-class status were only just beginning, and two, that their aspirations to middle-classness were viewed with considerable resentment by their (largely) upper-caste and middle-caste neighbors (see Geetha 1998, 323–24).

When I first met the family, Radha was in an advanced stage of pregnancy and Omvati was very happy at the prospect of having another grandchild. At the same time, it was clear to me that Omvati resented Radha's closeness to Satish. Omvati often commented sarcastically on Radha's "obsession" with adorning herself and about the couple's going out together in the evenings to the movies or to the nearby bazaar.[14] She commented that Radha was "greedy"—but most of the time, it wasn't clear to me if she was referring to Radha's "greed" for commodities or for her husband. Omvati frequently complained that "city girls" were "different" from girls in her village: city girls like Radha were independent, ambitious, and always hankered after "more." "They want too much," she said, "and that is dangerous." I got the distinct impression that, in Omvati's discourse, the dangers of erotic desire were conflated with women's desires for commodities. This impression was confirmed in my subsequent interactions with her and Radha.

Omvati hinted at the relation between erotic desire and desires for commodities several times. She complained: "I think these days women want too much. They want everything. It is dangerous to always want all the time. What will happen to the family if women always want more and more." Frequently in my interactions with them, I would get an acute sense that when Omvati complained to me about Radha's "greed," she was not merely talking about Radha's desire for commodities. This was confirmed when, on another occasion, Omvati repeated, "Girls these days, especially city girls, want everything." When I pushed her to clarify what she meant, she replied: "They want more things. They always want to have, have, have. But they also want a lot from their husbands." In Omvati's discourse, Radha was emblem-

atic of the urban, modern Indian woman whose dangerous desires articulate the coimplication of erotic desire and the yearning for commodities.

Omvati was not the only one to suggest the mutual imbrication of erotics and the yearning for commodities. Sunita, another young, lower-middle-class woman compared her "feelings" for commodities with love. Sunita, who was unmarried, rarely went shopping. But she enjoyed watching ads on TV and going to the nearby market to window-shop. One day, I asked how she felt about looking at ads and shop windows even when she knew she could not afford to buy the commodities being advertised. She responded that her longing for these goods was like unrequited love. Using language that reminded me of a Hindi film dialogue, she said: "Its like when you love someone [*jab kissise mohabbat ho jati hai*] and they don't love you back. You don't stop loving that person. You get happiness from looking at them, and from knowing they are there. It is like that. It is nice to look at these new things that have come into the market. We can't afford them. We may never be able to afford them. But who knows. And in any case, what is wrong in wondering?"

According to Žižek, fantasy provides the coordinates or frame for desire: "Through fantasy we learn to desire" (1989, 118). Through wondering or (in my terms) fantasizing, Sunita learns to desire. The fantasies of women like Sunita are engendered not just by the desires to acquire commodities, but also by their experiences of longing and deprivation. At the same time, women like Radha and Sunita seemed to obtain a bittersweet pleasure from their desire for commodities, from what Louisa Schein has termed the desire to desire (1999a, 366, 369; see also Žižek's [1989] study on the reflexivity of desire). The desires evoked by commodities were at once real and phantasmic, desires that were impossible to fulfill "within the parameters of sociality [the 'symbolic' in Lacanian terminology, 'capitalism' in Marxian]" (Allison 1996, 27). There seemed to be a pleasure in imagining, in fantasizing about the kinds of lives that might be possible if one owned these commodities. This pleasure was like the bittersweet pleasure of falling in love, even when one knew that it was unrequited.

The eroticization of the commodity has been well demonstrated by Schein in her analysis of cargo cults and commodity erotics in China (1999a, 345, 363). In India, state-endorsed discourses of consumerism and mass-mediated incitements to the desire for objects resulted in the emergence of a new "brand" of woman (Sunder Rajan 1999b; compare Irigaray 1985). Mary John argues that a new form of subjectivity is produced by "the need to re-

cruit the new middle class woman as a 'consuming subject' of local/global products in a vastly expanded market . . . , a recruitment that cannot take place without her sexualization as an actively desiring subject" (1998, 382).

Consumerist subjectivity, however, is constructed not only by dominant discourses on gender but also, as we saw with Omvati and her family, class and caste. For most of the men and women with whom I worked, aspirations to upward mobility into the middle class were frequently expressed in terms of a greater preoccupation with female modesty and respectability and, in many cases, an increased surveillance of women's sexuality. These anxieties were especially heightened in the case of my lower-caste informants who, surrounded as they were by upper-caste neighbors, felt particularly subject to their surveillance. Their concerns about the purity of "their" women's sexuality were frequently expressed in terms of anxieties about the desires and behavior of their young daughters and daughters-in-law. In some cases, it was also expressed in terms of worries about young sons.

Let me turn to the example of Prabhakar, a lower-caste man who lived in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in West Delhi with his wife, who was a schoolteacher, and his young son. Prabhakar had migrated from Tamil Nadu after finishing high school, and had attended two years of college. One of his biggest regrets was that he had been unable to complete his college education because of financial problems—this, he believed, had hampered his ability to "improve the conditions" of his life and those of his family. He and his wife were extremely anxious about how, at the same time that his family was gradually acquiring upward mobility, they had less and less control over the behavior of their college-going son. Their son, on the other hand, was supremely self-confident and told me on several occasions that he was only going to college to allay his parents' anxieties. He insisted that "social knowledge and not book knowledge" would help him succeed in life. He wished to start his own business and believed that "knowing the right people, being in the *right set* [he used the English phrase], knowing how to talk and how to dress" was what was important. An attractive young man, dressed in the latest fashion of an MTV VJ, he had a reputation in the neighborhood for being quite the ladies' man. While this filled him with pride, it caused a great deal of concern to his parents. One day, his father confided to me: "My son roams around in the market with his buddies all evening . . . [he] often comes home late night. God knows what he does there: it's not as if he is always buying things there. But it is bad for his character to hang around there all the time. You should see the clothes he wears and how he reeks of fragrance. He is always hanging around in the market. It puts ideas into his head. One

of our neighbors saw him with a girl. I hope he never does anything that will bring shame to our family."

Evidently, Prabhakar and his son had very different opinions as to what would enable him to ascend, as it were, the ladder of caste and class mobility. While Prabhakar believed education was the key to upward mobility, his son depended on "social knowledge." It is important to note that "social knowledge," for him, consisted not only of having the right contacts but of also being able to display the outward markers of belonging "in the right set"—through making certain consumerist lifestyle choices, such as wearing the right clothes. On one level, this might be indicative of a generational shift occurring in the aftermath of economic liberalization and the rampant consumerism it unleashed. However, we need also to attend to Prabhakar's implicit fears about how consumerism brought about not only a change in people's appearance but also their behavior and, by implication, their desires. More concretely, as in Omvati's concerns about Radha's desires to "want more," the pleasures of being in the market, and presumably of gazing upon the commodities prominently displayed there, are explicitly linked with erotic pleasure: who knows what ideas come into a young man's head as he roams the (deceptively) anonymous and seductively sensuous spaces of the market? And, worse, what if he *acts* on these ideas and does something that will shame his lower-caste and precariously lower-middle-class family?

Thus, while most of the other examples in this chapter are about women, it is essential that we do not attribute consumerist desires solely to them: the most casual observations of households and markets in urban India will attest to the fact that men shared equally, if not more, in these longings for commodities. Almost all the men that I met in the course of my fieldwork aspired to own at least some of the commodities advertised on television, such as color television sets, VCRs, automobiles, and, especially in the case of younger men, fashionable clothes. Several spoke of how in the past they had been uninterested (or less interested) in shopping, whereas in recent years, they had become "curious" about the objects advertised on television. They all insisted that before the advent of advertisements on television, they had had little idea of what was available in the markets. Yet, significantly, apart from some concerns about how consumerism was preventing families from saving money, there did not seem to be a moralistic discourse about how *men's* consumer habits might be undermining "Indian culture" or "tradition." In contrast, women's desires for commodities were more likely to be perceived as a threat to the moral (and not just financial)

welfare of the family, or as indicative of an attrition of "traditional" values under the onslaught of transnational media. Even those men who coveted the latest VCR or scooter would complain to me, without the least irony or self-consciousness, of how the extravagant habits of their wives and daughters was not only driving them to bankruptcy but, more pertinent to my argument here, encouraging them to adopt "Western" or "foreign" lifestyles and aspirations and, therefore, threatening to erode their "tradition."

Also, let us not forget that the yearning for commodities implicated women in more ways than one. In some cases, the febrile consumerism of the middle and lower-middle classes led to a rise in demands for increasingly ostentatious dowries. Consequently, young brides were especially vulnerable to being harassed for dowries. Almost all the lower-middle-class men and women I interviewed, in particular those with daughters of marriageable age, expressed intense anxieties about the kinds of dowries they would be expected to provide, and many young women were terrified about the kind of treatment they would receive if their in-laws were dissatisfied with the dowries they brought with them when they got married. As noted by V. Geetha, "It is not accidental that dowry demands are never simply that: they inscribe themselves literally and metaphorically on the wifely body. They constitute this body as a thing, which may be discarded if it cannot yield its essential 'use' value" (1998, 314). For many of the women with whom I did fieldwork, on the other side of the pleasures of yearning for commodities lay a sinister nexus between consumerist desire, avarice, and the gendered (female) body.

Commodities, and the yearnings they evoked, were not simply reflective or expressive of individual and collective fantasies, but were constitutive of different forms of gendered subjectivity. It seems most productive to situate the pleasure my informants derived from gazing on commodities, and yearning for them, in larger realms of practice or habitus, such as bodily comportment, everyday practices and habits, social relationships, fantasies, anxieties, and yearnings—all of which were evoked and mediated by an intertextual field that developed in late twentieth-century India. I turn next to this intertextual field and the sociodiscursive context in which it was located.

Transnationalism, Commodity Erotics, and the Intertextual Field

The markets and streets of urban and semiurban Indian centers present many examples of the visual density of transnational public culture that, as Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge point out, is an "interocular

field . . . structured so that each site or setting for the socializing or regulating of the public gaze is to some degree affected by the experience of the other sites" (1995, 12). This interocular field is also intertextual, and is constituted by a range of texts, such as advertisements and billboards dominating cityscapes, the novels and magazines conspicuously displayed in kiosks and newspaper stands in markets, railway stations, and bus stands, the proliferation of television channels now available for people to watch in the privacy of their homes, and, of course, the ubiquitous persistence of popular cinema.

By the late 1990s, this intertextual field was saturated with representations of commodities. Alluring photographs of commodities were splashed across the pages of newspapers and magazines. The enormous range of print media that thrived in the 1980s was enhanced in the 1990s by a spate of lifestyle-oriented magazines devoted to the consumption of new commodities newly available to Indians with discretionary incomes (for instance, *India Today Plus* and numerous "bridal magazines"). Popular cinema has always imaged commodities in the spectacles it staged for its spectators, but films made in the 1990s revealed an excess of spectacle dominated by commodity aesthetics. These films explicitly focused on the consumerist lifestyles of affluent Indians, newly visible yuppies, and Non-Resident Indians, or NRIs (for instance, *Hum apke hain kaun* [Who are we to you, 1994], *Kuch kuch hota hai* [Something is happening, 1999], and *Pardes* [Distant land, 1997], respectively).

As Haug points out, in its widest sense, the aesthetics of a commodity frequently become detached from the object itself (1986, 17). In late twentieth-century India, representations of commodities were everywhere. As noted above, markets, shop windows, billboards—literally, the physical landscape of large cities, small towns, and some rural areas—were completely transformed so that the visual field was now dense with images of commodities in a manner that was unprecedented in scale, depth, or magnitude. Representations of commodities acquired a force of their own quite apart from the commodities themselves.

In addition, after the 1990s, the intertextual field constituted by mass media was simultaneously saturated with representations of erotics. Emblematic of this phenomenon was a series of print ads for a condom called Kamasutra, or KS. Released in the early 1990s, these controversial and popular ads portrayed a young, scantily clad heterosexual couple engaging in foreplay. In almost all the ads, our eyes are drawn to the woman who is depicted in near-orgasmic ecstasy. The KS ads reinscribed Orientalist discourses about the *Kamasutra* in their attempts to invoke an essentially

Indian attitude toward sex.[15] More significantly, however, they marked their difference from earlier ads for condoms in several ways. While previous ads for condoms emphasized family planning, KS focused unequivocally, if not solely, on erotic pleasure. The second striking feature of the KS ads was that, while they depicted the sexual pleasure of the couple, they visually foreground the erotic desires and pleasures of the woman.

Mary John asks if "the legitimacy accorded to visual representations of the erotic couple" and India's entry into "a new phase of capitalist development" might not be related (1998, 382). The intertextual field I have described above did not emerge in a vacuum, but grew out of a political-economic and cultural context marked by the heightened presence of globalized capital and transnational mass media. The 1980s were dominated by a significant shift in the government's economic policy from capital-goods investment to a consumer economy. This shift in investment was accompanied by the imposition of structural adjustment policies by the International Monetary Fund, which emphasized "austerity measures" and decreased social spending by the state, and a relaxation of curbs on imports. In the 1980s, state-controlled television played a crucial role in creating the cultural conditions for these economic changes by encouraging citizen-viewers to spend on consumer goods (see studies by Mankekar [1999] and Rajagopal [2001] for extended analyses of the role of television in facilitating consumer spending).

The expansion of the middle classes and the rise in consumer spending correlated with (and accelerated after) the advent of transnational television in 1991 (see Mankekar's [2004] study, for additional information on consumer spending in the early 1990s). The spectral presence of "the West" shaped many of the conflicts and debates that arose at this time about the definition of "Indianness" and the boundaries between the "East" and the "West." These debates and conflicts became especially volatile after the rapid expansion of transnational satellite television. Nationalist elites and the lower-middle-class men and women with whom I worked responded to transnational satellite television with a mixture of excitement and anxiety; many were concerned that imported programs like *The Young and the Restless* and MTV would erode or contaminate Indian culture.[16] Fears about Westernization, or rather Americanization, were somewhat allayed when broadcasters realized that they would have to "Indianize" their programming in order to cater to a broad spectrum of viewers. While at first viewers had watched imported shows out of curiosity, they reverted to state-controlled television as the novelty wore off, and ratings began to plummet. Many of the new programs adopted some of the generic characteristics of the im-

ports, so that there were Indianized versions of talk shows, game shows, soap operas, made-for-TV movies and miniseries, and music videos. These programs were by no means simple imitations of their Western counterparts: they were hybrid productions that incorporated "Indian" themes and discourses into their narrative frameworks and deployed a diverse range of representational codes and aesthetic conventions.

These television programs were produced in a context overdetermined by an intensification of the transnational traffic in images, texts, and commodities. Within India, the programs beamed via transnational satellite networks facilitated the creation of the new intertextual field described above, in which commodity aesthetics and erotics were inextricably entangled. This newly formed intertextual field, and the commodity aesthetics it fostered, formed the context for the longings and anxieties of consumers described earlier in this chapter. In contrast to the earlier Gandhian ethos of austerity that had been hegemonic among some sections of the urban middle classes from the 1950s through (about) the 1970s, from the 1980s onward, consumer goods fast became indices of upward mobility for middle-class and lower-middle-class consumers. And as my ethnographic research demonstrated, these goods became fantasy objects of "what life could be like."

The production of consumerist desire was accelerated with the advent of transnational satellite television. The talk shows, films, and soap operas beamed via transnational networks played a crucial role in introducing Indian audiences to consumerist and, in the case of imported programs, Western lifestyles. A consumerist lifestyle entailed the desire for and, if possible, the acquisition of commodities, such as fashionable clothes, cosmetics, automobiles (or, at the very least, scooters), and home appliances like mixer-grinders, televisions, VCRs, refrigerators, cooking ranges, and so on.

According to several of my informants, acquiring a consumerist lifestyle enabled one to display visible signifiers of modernity, but, they argued, it was critically important to retain "traditional" values. As one lower-caste, lower-middle-class man argued, buying commodities could "help one become modern, have a modern lifestyle, yet hold on to traditional values." When I asked him to clarify what he meant by "traditional values," he promptly replied: "Our family, our personal relationships, our culture." This man was not alone in drawing a distinction between "lifestyle" and "values," such that one could acquire a modern lifestyle, yet "hold on" to "traditional" values. Furthermore, for many of my informants, the adoption of a "modern" lifestyle did not necessarily endanger one's national identity. In fact, as another viewer claimed, it was now possible to be "proud of being Indian" because

Indians "can now get everything here." This informant was alluding to the fact that in most urban centers in India it was now possible for people with discretionary incomes to purchase consumer goods that were once available only in the West. This viewer was by no means exceptional: for most of the men and women that I worked with, the availability of such a wide range of consumer goods was an important marker of India having "finally" attained modernity.

If the introduction of transnational satellite television led to far-reaching quantitative changes in terms of the numbers of channels now available to viewers, it also enabled new kinds of cultural production consisting of a marked qualitative and discursive shift in television programming from an earlier emphasis on nationalist themes and "social messages" (the mainstay of state-owned TV from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s; compare Mankekar 1999) to an explicit focus on the intimate. On the one hand, many of the serials shown on transnational networks contained extremely conservative representations of gender and family, with many extolling the virtues of "traditional" (that is, extended) families; at the same time, the new preoccupation with the intimate entailed diverse representations of the erotic never before seen on Indian television (see John 1998, 368).

Eroticizing the Intimate

The programs of the early 1990s displayed an unprecedented fascination with intimate relationships, particularly marital, premarital, and extramarital relationships, and contained new and varied representations of erotics (explicit as well as implicit). These programs included serials (for instance, *Tara* [Zee TV], *Shanti* [STAR], and *Hasratein* [Zee TV], sitcoms, talk shows (like *Purush kshetra* and *The Priya Tendulkar Show* [both El TV]), made-for-TV films and miniseries, music programs (many of which were based on songs from Indian films), Indianized versions of MTV, and television advertisements telecast on transnational networks but produced specifically for audiences in South Asia and its diasporas. The emphasis on the intimate and the erotic was strongest in talk shows (which proliferated after the advent of transnational television), serials, MTV-influenced music videos, and television advertisements.

But for years now, popular films have provided opportunities for the public expression of erotics. How were televisual representations of erotics different from those prevalent in popular Hindi film? Since the Indian film industry is so large and heterogeneous, I will focus on popular Hindi, or Bollywood, films. As Rachel Dwyer points out, in Hindi films, erotic long-

ing is frequently portrayed in terms of romance and expressed through the use of song, fetishization, and metaphor. In most "mainstream" films, she adds, "film songs and their picturization provide greater opportunities for sexual display than dialogue and narrative sections of the films, with their specific images of clothes, body and body language, while the song lyrics are largely to do with sexuality, ranging from romance to suggestive and overt lyrics" (Dwyer 2000, 187–88).[17] Representations of erotics in Bollywood films have shifted over time. As one viewer pointed out to me, while in older Hindi films sexual desire tended to be portrayed rather elliptically (which, she claimed, accentuated rather than diffused their erotic power), more recent Hindi films, with songs like *Jumma chumma de de* ("Give me, give me a kiss"; *Hum*, music director Laxmikant Pyarelal, lyrics Anand Bakshi) or *Choli ke peeche kya hai* ("What lies beneath my blouse?"; *Khalnayak*; music director Laxmikant Pyarelal, lyrics Anand Bakshi) were fairly explicit in their representation of erotic desire. Bollywood representations of erotics drew on diverse aesthetic practices, ranging from "folk" performative conventions to MTV-influenced song-and-dance sequences—including several that focused not only on the sexualized female body but also the sexualized male body.[18]

Despite the sometimes explicit display of erotics in song sequences, in terms of narrative focus, erotics in early 90s Hindi films tended to be subordinated to and subsumed under romance (compare Dwyer 2000).[19] Thus, while Hindi films have always provided sites for public representations of erotics, the content, modalities, and cultural implications of televisual representations of erotics in the 1990s were qualitatively different. For one, in most 1990s Hindi films, erotic desire outside romance was explicitly condemned and was restricted largely to villains and vamps. In contrast, television programs in the early 1990s represented erotic desire in a relatively open-ended manner. Furthermore, the erotic constituted a central and explicit focus of many television programs.

This was particularly true of talk shows. Hosts, panelists, and live audiences in talk shows like *Purush Kshetra* (which roughly translates to Man's World; El TV) would analyze, in considerable detail and with unabashed candor, different aspects of male sexuality (ranging from impotence to "male" perspectives on polygyny), and male and female sexual desires.[20] For instance, one controversial episode examined the following question: Why do men visit prostitutes? The episode presented a panel of two prostitutes, a man who visited a prostitute and eventually married her, a psychologist, and a social worker. The episode's host, the celebrated stage and film actor

Kiron Kher, moderated the discussion and asked questions about the sexual and psychological "needs" that men fulfilled by going to prostitutes, and audience members debated whether these needs could ever be completely fulfilled within the confines of marriage. For example, one of the prostitutes on the panel spoke of how some of her clients came to her because their wives would not do "certain things" with them, thus making it "necessary" for them to seek sexual satisfaction elsewhere, at which point Kiron Kher brought up the question of women's unfulfilled sexual desires and the avenues available to *them* to seek sexual fulfillment. While in its last few moments the episode acquired a somewhat moralistic tone with the social worker and the host speaking about the "dirty needs" of men who exploit women, this episode was remarkable in that it discussed questions of sexuality, erotic desire, and marriage in a manner unprecedented on Indian television.

Similarly, Indi-pop music videos frequently focused on women's erotic desires. One popular Indi-pop music video, *Deewane deewane to deewane hain* (Shweta Shetty; Magnasound), has the heroine complaining about the number of men who wish to have sexual relationships with her. In a husky voice, pulsating with erotic desire, she humorously describes how, despite her turning them away, these "mad men" persist in their desire for her (*deewane deewane hi rahenge*). She sings of how her beauty has made it impossible for her to go out of her house for fear of causing a sensation. But this is no passive, self-effacing beauty: she alternately titillates and rejects her suitors' advances toward her. There is nothing coy or virginal about her—her clothing, her demeanor, and her voice are all strident with erotic desire. She turns down her lovers' amorous advances not to protect her virtue but because she is weary of their pursuit. The movements of her body as she gyrates sensuously to the music and her expressions as she alternately arches her eyebrows in mock scorn or shrugs her shoulders as if to dismiss their ardor emphasize that she wants to be in control of when (not if) she will have sex with them. One frame features her tickling one of the men seductively, sensuously, with a feather. Another places her in the foreground, complaining about "mad" men who will not leave her alone. In the background we see another man lying exhausted on a bed. She pokes fun throughout at her suitors and, at one point, goes so far as to claim that their desire for her has robbed them of their identities. They are so pathetic, she claims, that they have stayed unmarried because they are mad with desire for her.

The aesthetic conventions of this video are a postmodern pastiche that playfully parodies "tradition" and "modernity" through, for instance, the

clothes the characters wear. As in other music videos (and, for that matter, Hindi film songs) the heroine changes her clothes frequently during the song, switching back and forth between leather boots and tights and attire featured in the erotic sculptures of Hindu temples. The video contains several close-ups of the men pursuing her, with the camera lingering voyeuristically (but also parodically) on their bare, buffed upper bodies. A series of frames focus on one of the men vainly flexing his muscles for our consumption. These shots target not just women in the audience but, through their evocation of homoerotic desire, men as well—the evocation of homoerotic desire will intensify at the end of the video.

The closing frames of this video are particularly significant: tired of turning away the mad men who are trying desperately to woo her, our heroine stands outside her boudoir inviting each of them in. As soon as the last man has entered the room, she locks the door from outside. The camera immediately takes us inside: we see the men bump into each other and discover they have been conned into believing that they will be able to make love with her. But they do not stay disappointed for too long, for they discover an erotic interest in each other. We next see them enter into a collective, unmistakably sexual, embrace. The video ends with our heroine standing outside the room, smiling smugly, knowingly. She has been able to shake them off and deflect their erotic interest in her onto each other.

Like many Bollywood heroines, the protagonist of *Deewane deewane to deewane hain* is represented as an eroticized subject. Unlike the film heroines of the early 1990s, many of whom were coy about their erotic desires, this woman derives obvious pleasure from her sexual attractiveness and her sexuality. In this music video, and in countless others like it, women are no longer simply objects of male fantasy, but are represented as active and assertive erotic subjects who *choose* whether, when, and with whom to pursue their desires. While most televisual representations of erotics reinscribe it in heteronormative terms, a few recent productions (for instance, music videos like *Deewane deewane to deewane hain*) also contain an explicit homoerotic content, and a few others portray men and women cross-dressing or displaying homoerotic desire or both.

The struggles and dilemmas of women in the serials of the 1990s contrasted sharply with those of the 1980s. As several of my informants pointed out to me, while in earlier television serials women struggled to balance their commitments to the family versus nation (as in *Rajani* [Doordarshan]), the heroines of the 1990s confronted entirely different dilemmas and conflicts. At the same time that most serials of the 1990s continued to depict women

in conservative terms (that is, as sexually modest, dutiful toward their families, etc.), there were several that, because of their foregrounding of women's erotic desires, attracted tremendous attention. Serials like *Tara* (Zee TV) or *Shanti* (STAR), which drew huge ratings and sparked a new trend, showed women actively, sometimes aggressively, pursuing erotic pleasure and facing the social and emotional consequences of doing so. Indeed, when I began this research in 1992, I would attempt to get the ball rolling by asking viewers what they thought were some of the major differences between the programs they used to watch in the 1980s, and those telecast after the introduction of transnational satellite networks. An overwhelming majority would respond that the most striking change lay in terms of the contrast in the portrayal of women. One viewer summarized this contrast between the serials of the 1980s and 1990s in terms of "the change from Rajani to Tara." This viewer was pointing to the contrasts in the preoccupations, personalities, and trajectories of these TV heroines who had become household names in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. Rajani was the heroine of a serial telecast in the late 1980s on Doordarshan, state-controlled television, before the advent of transnational satellite television. Rajani was a housewife who committed her energies to correcting "social ills" (such as the corruption of bureaucrats, domestic violence, and so on) while remaining a dutiful wife and mother (see Mankekar 1999). Tara was the heroine of a serial telecast in the early 1990s, shortly after Zee TV was introduced in India. This serial pioneered a new genre of narratives that dwelled on the intimate lives of modern, urban (frequently upper-middle-class and upper-class) Indian women: its heroine and some others who followed in her wake were independent, led unconventional lives, were assertive in their pursuit of erotic desire, and had premarital or extramarital affairs. For instance, Svetlana, of the immensely popular *Swabhimaan* (Doordarshan), was the mistress of a wealthy industrialist who struggled to maintain her dignity and power. Serials such as *Dard* (Zee TV) and *Kora Kagaz* (STAR) portrayed strong women who were emotionally and sexually frustrated in their marriages and turned to younger men for satisfaction and comfort. As I learned from my ethnographic observations, the portrayals of heroines like Tara and Svetlana were not without ambivalence; yet these women were generally depicted with sympathy, as heroines who struggled courageously to seek fulfillment not only from their careers but also through erotic pleasure.

Dwyer points out that the family remains central in Bollywood film: "In many romances, the problem facing the family is the incorporation of erotic

love into the family's other relationships" (2000, 139). Thus, for instance, most mainstream Bollywood films of the 1990s (such as *Hum saath saath hain* [We stand united, 1999], *Dilwale dulhaniya le jayenge* [The brave of heart will take the bride, 1995], and *Kuch kuch hota hai* [Something is happening, 1999]) portrayed a consistent preoccupation with the subordination of erotic desire to familial obligations and duties. In comparison, some of the television programs produced after the advent of transnational satellite networks reveal a more complicated discursive terrain in which erotic desire was, at once, foregrounded and held in tension with familial obligation. Erotic desire was variably positioned vis-à-vis conjugality, and these representations, in turn, had consequences for how the family was portrayed. As in Hindi films, most television serials kept alive the tension between the purportedly sacrosanct nature of the (extended) family and the conjugal unit (compare John 1997 and Niranjana 1995). However, while the conflict between conjugal desire and duties toward the extended family is hardly new (it is, in fact, the subject of innumerable folk tales, songs, and novels; see, for instance, Raheja and Gold 1994), television programs of the 1990s exhibited an increased visibility of conjugality. As I learned from my fieldwork, this heightened visibility of conjugality articulated with the tension many of my informants experienced between conjugal desire and obligations and duties toward the extended family (compare John 1999). Several of my informants spoke explicitly of how the "new" emphasis on the married couple threatened to tear the "traditional" joint family asunder.[21]

But, as I note above, erotic desire on television was not confined to the conjugal relationship. In a hegemonic context where erotic desire is presumably contained within the confines of heterosexual marriage, what do televisual representations of erotic desire outside or before marriage signify? In many serials and talk shows in the early 1990s, women were portrayed engaging in premarital and extramarital affairs, bearing illegitimate children, seducing younger men, and defying parental restrictions by pursuing erotic desire—and, unlike cinematic representations of erotically assertive women, these women were represented not as hyper-Westernized vamps but as "modern Indian women."[22] For instance, Savitri, the heroine of a popular television serial *Hasratein* (Zee TV), was portrayed as a modern woman who is a partner in a public relations company. Like all soap operas, *Hasratein*'s plot is convoluted and is virtually impossible to summarize, but the central story line focuses on the heroine Savitri's fifteen-year relationship with a man who is married and has another family. Savitri, or Savi, as

she is known in the serial, and her lover live together and have a child. A successful, upper-middle-class professional, she is supremely self-confident as she advances in her career.

I expected my lower-middle-class and working-class informants to disapprove of Savi, and many, indeed, did. But, as several of them insisted, she remained quintessentially "Indian" in her devotion to her children and in her loyalty to her husband and his parents.[23] In fact, as Savi reminds her lover's father, she is the reason why her lover has maintained his ties with his "other family." Until the end, when the narrative reaches its denouement, she maintains a cordial relationship with his parents and treats them with the respect a "traditional" daughter-in-law is supposed to extend to her in-laws.

However, as the serial draws to a close, Savi is penalized for pushing the boundaries of conventional Indian womanhood. *Hasratein* ends on a highly ambivalent note. Savi's lover is injured in a car accident and loses his memory. His wife and parents take care of him and convince him that they are his (primary) family. He remembers only fragments of his life with Savi, and cannot recognize their daughter. At the same time, he misses Savi and longs for her. When he fails to regain his health and memory, his wife decides to take him abroad for treatment. In the last episode, his wife permits Savi to bid him good-bye; in the end, Savi and her daughter are left alone. Savi is clearly punished for pursuing erotic desire, that too for a married man. Yet, she is represented with tremendous sympathy. She is always portrayed as elegantly yet modestly dressed (she is frequently portrayed in "traditional" Indian clothes). She is soft-spoken and performs all the conventional duties of a wife and mother. She is dignified and respectful but does not hesitate to fight for her rights. This is in sharp contrast to her lover, who is depicted as loving but confused and somewhat weak-willed; after his accident he is reduced to utter dependency on his wife and parents. He can no longer attend to the business he and Savi set up, because of his amnesia and, in fact, appears incoherent in most of the closing episode.

Savi's portrayal is noteworthy for several reasons. As noted above, her pursuit of erotic desire in this serial is not represented without ambivalence (she does suffer for her transgressions); nevertheless, she is represented as a mature and dignified woman (rather than as immature or promiscuous). Further, in narratives like *Hasratein*, the pursuit of erotic pleasure becomes the hallmark of a particular kind of woman: upper-class, usually professional, but still "Indian" in her loyalty to her family and to other "traditional" customs and conventions. While *Hasratein* was, by no means, the norm, this serial, along with others like *Tara*, *Shanti*, and *Swabhimaan* revealed

ambivalent and shifting discourses of Indian Womanhood in which women struggled to juggle their responsibilities and duties to their families vis-à-vis their pursuit of erotic pleasure.

Women viewers' reactions to these representations spoke volumes—not of their own erotic desires per se, but about the changing configurations of gender, class, and nation that occurred in late twentieth-century India. In most cases, these reconfigurations were refracted by class. Many of the lower-middle-class and working-class women I worked with were quick to point out that most of the women pursuing erotic pleasure on television were upper middle class or upper class, with successful careers and financial independence. One lower-middle-class woman spoke of how upper-class women inhabited a "different world" in which the "rules for behavior and for conducting relationships" were completely different from those regulating her world. At the same time, several of the women I interviewed argued that these women's stories revealed how "Indian culture" was changing. While some hastened to add that these were not changes that they wanted to institute in their own lives, they believed nonetheless that "Indian culture" was being transformed, and that these TV heroines were harbingers of other changes that would follow, such as the breakup of families, teen pregnancies, and so on.

Most of the women I interviewed believed that these women's pursuit of erotic pleasure was explicitly tied to their class positions, specifically to their upward mobility and financial independence. As one lower-middle-class woman pointed out to me, the sexual freedom women like Tara and Svetlana enjoyed was enabled by their financial independence. She insisted that it fell to the middle classes to "protect" their culture and their values (*apni sabhyata, apne sanskar ki raksha madhya varg ke logon ko hi karni hai*). Like several other informants, this woman claimed that most "rich people," the upper classes, had been "contaminated" by Westernization, in particular by their access to Western education and, in some cases, their ability to travel abroad. For many of my lower-middle-class and middle-class informants, upper-class women were emblematic of the influence of Western promiscuity, and their opinions of "rich" women were based primarily on what they saw on television.

Some of my informants responded to the proliferation of erotics in public culture by attempting to hark back to a "traditional" culture, one that was untouched by the contaminating influences of Westernization. As several feminist historians and cultural analysts remind us, contests over tradition are profoundly gendered and are frequently predicated on the containment

of women (for instance, Mani 1989 and Sunder Rajan 1990). One upper-caste, lower-middle-class woman suggested that when upward mobility and financial independence were not "anchored" in a "fundamental understanding of our culture, what it means to be Indian, what it means for a woman to obey her elders, be loyal to her family, and put her family first," what results is "chaos." In general, for many of my Hindu informants (of different castes), one way to retain ties with "Indian culture" was by watching the televised Hindu epics (see Gillespie 1995; Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001).

Several others who were highly critical of representations of erotics on television, responded to these female characters with anger and defensiveness. They often reacted by appropriating Hindu nationalist discourses of national purity in which Indian culture was conflated with a pristine Hindu culture. For instance, one upper-caste and lower-middle-class woman said that she felt that "when the winds of change blow" it is important to "return to our roots." When pushed to clarify how one might return to one's "roots" and what these "roots" were, she explained it in terms of a pristine Hindu culture (see also Oza 2001 and Rajagopal 2001). These discourses about roots and Indian culture were aligned with the attempts, over the past couple of decades, of Hindu nationalists to recuperate a "glorious Hindu" culture. In conjunction with the Hindu nationalist project to establish Hindu culture as national culture, these discourses were predicated on excluding, sometimes eliminating, Other (Islamic, Christian, and lower-caste) cultures.

Conclusion

The mass consumption of texts and commodities made possible by the advent of transnational television in the 1990s had consequences not only for viewers' imagination of erotics and intimacy but, perhaps, also for their perspectives on upward mobility, and affiliations to community. In this chapter, I have focused on the eroticization of two interrelated domains of Indian public culture: commodities and their representations, and discourses of intimacy on transnational television. I began by analyzing how, as part of a transnational and intertextual field, commodities displayed in the public sphere were erotically charged, such that eroticism and consumption were mutually implicated. The erotic charge of commodities ensued not only from the desire to buy or acquire them, but also from the fantasies and yearnings they evoked. But unlike what Schein (1999a) found in China, where the desire to desire may be interpreted as a critique of the state, in India the desire to desire was incited and endorsed by uneasy alliances between the state, domestic industry, and multinational capital.

Arvind Rajagopal has pointed out that "through the genre of advertising, television promotes a libidinal economy that helps secure and reproduce the physical economy and is interwoven with it" (1999, 58). Transnational television played a crucial role in the yoking of erotic and commodity desire, not only through the advertisements it telecast but, equally important, through a range of other programs, such as talk shows, serials, and MTV-inspired music programs. Unlike programs telecast on state-run television during the 1980s, those telecast via transnational networks revealed an overwhelming preoccupation with intimate relationships. Some of the programs telecast on transnational networks portrayed women who were not only eroticized, but who actively pursued erotic pleasure. The erotic agency of these women was mediated and circumscribed in various ways. In some cases, even though they pursued erotic pleasure, they retained their "Indianness" (defined, by many of my informants, in terms of their devotion to their families). Others were represented as upper-class and Westernized women who, indeed, seemed to embody a threat to the purported purity of "Indian culture." These portrayals articulated with the anxieties of my lower-middle-class and middle-class informants who were concerned about how their own identities and ways of life might be endangered by the social changes they observed around themselves. Moreover, not all my informants derived pleasure or were even comfortable with televisual representations of women as erotic subjects.[24] Many responded by increasing their surveillance of family members and neighbors; still others, by aligning themselves with Hindu-nationalist and exclusionary discourses of cultural purity and national culture.

In some instances, representations of erotics in public culture resulted in the reification of the boundaries between Indian and "Western" culture. When perceived as foreign or Western in orientation or origin, representations of erotics were deemed extremely threatening to the purported purity of national culture—as indicated by the controversies surrounding the Miss World pageant in Bangalore in December 1996, and the protests against the portrayal of a lesbian relationship between the heroines of Deepa Mehta's film *Fire* (see the work of Gopinath [2005] and Patel [2004] for excellent analyses of the controversies surrounding *Fire*). In the case of the Miss World pageant, a large coalition of protesters criticized the decision to hold the pageant in India as symptomatic of the contamination of Indian culture by Western discourses of gender, sexuality, and the erotic (see John 1998 and Oza 2001). Similarly, the protesters against *Fire* represented the lesbian relationship between the heroines as "foreign" and, therefore, antinational. In the public protests surrounding both these controversies, transnational

television, multinational capital, and the globalization of the Indian economy were all conceived as threats to the purity of Indian culture. In these protests, Indian culture was reified, and its difference from Western culture essentialized and fetishized. Erotics became the terrain on which these reifications of Indianness took place.

At the same time, representations of erotics also signaled how notions of Indianness and Indian culture were being reconfigured. In the specific historical and cultural context in which I did my research, erotics were inseparably entangled with hegemonic discourses of caste, class, and nation. Hence, while it has not been my intent to describe "the sexual lives of [urban] Indians," I have examined how the construction and evocation of erotic pleasure provides us with a lens to trace the contours of a sociohistorical conjuncture. I was witness to the twinning of desire and deprivation for many of the men and women that I got to know during my fieldwork. This combination of desire and deprivation was built into the very structure of commodity capitalism and the specific forms it acquired in late twentieth-century India.[25] The erotic was deeply enmeshed in psychic and structural configurations of longing, pleasure, and power, and was part of the constitution of subjectivity along axes of caste, class, gender, and family position. Erotics constituted a force field of power, pleasure, and danger, through its articulation of desires and anxieties pertaining to upward mobility, class, modernity, and tradition. At stake in these desires and anxieties was not only the reconfiguration of hierarchies of gender, caste, and class within India, but the very definition of Indian culture.

Notes

This chapter is adapted from my article "Dangerous Desires: Television and Erotics in Late Twentieth-Century India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 2 (May 2004): 403–31. In its previous incarnations, this paper was presented at various venues: I would like to thank Anne Allison, Tom Boellstorff, Steve Caton, Lawrence Cohen, Vasudha Dalmia, Charu Gupta, Sarah Jain, Sudipta Kaviraj, Arthur Kleinman, Matthew Korhman, Francesca Orsini, Renato Rosaldo, Kumkum Sangari, Mary Steedly, Stanley Tambiah, Barbara Voss, and Woody Watson for their excellent suggestions at these forums, not all of which I have been able to adopt. I would like to thank Aditya Behl for his generous and patient assistance regarding representations of the erotic in sufi and Urdu literature. Rozita Dimova, Manishita Dass, and Robert Rollings provided insightful comments and excellent research assistance. I am especially grateful to Akhil Gupta, Louisa Schein, Ann Waltner, and three anonymous reviewers for *JAS*, for their assistance in revising this chapter. Last but not least, I remain indebted to the men and women with whom I conduct my fieldwork for their invaluable insights and generosity.

1. Although representations of erotics continue to be enormously popular, the late 1990s and early 2000s (coinciding, not surprisingly, with the consolidation of the stronghold of the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party over both the state and civil society) have also seen a profusion of television serials that valorize "family values," in particular, the virtues of the so-called traditional extended family. Far from replacing or displacing the earlier emphasis on erotics, these new serials may be interpreted, in part, as a backlash against them and, more important, as articulations of ongoing debates about the cultural implications of transnational media (compare Mankekar and Schein, this volume).

2. A related project, but one that lies outside the scope of this chapter, involves the place occupied by India in transnational discourses of erotics. See, for instance, the work of Manderson and Jolly (1997) for a discussion of "Western-imagined Oriental sexuality" (1997, 8).

3. Perhaps my experience would have been different had I chosen to interview rural women on sex and erotics. Compare Raheja and Gold (1994).

4. Compare V. Geetha's discussion of the covert and indirect expression of women's erotic desires (and frustrations) (1998). In one instance, she observes, a woman expressed her resentment against her husband: "The child sleeps between us these days" (1998, 307).

5. As Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly posit with respect to cross-cultural studies of sexuality, erotic desire is most fruitfully analyzed in terms of cultural encounters and "confluences" (1997). By situating contemporary expressions of erotic desire in India in the larger context of globalization and transnational media, I argue against either exoticizing an essentially "Indian" form of erotics or assuming that expressions of erotics in India are the same as in other parts of the world.

6. The scholarship on erotics in Indian literature, myth, and popular culture is voluminous. See, for instance, the work of Bannerjee (1989), Bhattacharya (1975), Doniger (1996), Kakar (1989), Nandy (1980), and Rege (1996). On the politics of sexuality in colonial and nationalist contexts, see the work of Das (1996), Sinha (1997), Srinivasan (1985), Thapan (1997), and Uberoi (1996).

7. Although the authorship of the *Kamasutra* has been attributed to Vatsayana, it is more likely that it was a composite text. See the work of Kumkum Roy (1998) for an excellent discussion of the politics underlying the translations and appropriations of the *Kamasutra* in the modern era.

8. It appears to be difficult to date the Natyashastra. Dimock et al. (1974) date it to before the sixth or seventh centuries CE. For more information on erotics within Sanskritic rasa theory, see the work of Dimock et al. (1974) and Siegel (1978). On the elaborate classification of love in the *Gitagovinda*, see Siegel's (1978) study, especially pages 42–57. On Tamil akam poetry, in which "the central relationship is that of man and woman," see the work of Dimock et al. (1974, 172) and Ramanujan (1973, 170–81). On the erotic components of *bhakti* poetry, see Lele's (1981) study.

9. For an analysis of the development of the ghazal in terms of the rise of middle-class consumerism and state policy, see also Manuel's (1993) study.

10. The relationship between same-sex erotics and the formation of gay and lesbian identities in modern India has been a site of controversy among analysts of popular culture, queer theorists, and gay and lesbian activists in India. Scholars like Rachel Dwyer have argued that "in India, some people enjoy same-sex sexual activity without wishing to claim a gay or lesbian or even bisexual identity; it is simply that they have sex with someone of the same sex but they expect to marry and live in a heterosexual relationship" (2000, 51–52), thus drawing a distinction between same-sex desire and the formation of gay and lesbian identities. Another perspective is offered by Giti Thadani, who points to the ways "heteropatriarchal" discourses have rendered gay and lesbian desire so invisible as to have foreclosed the articulation (until very recently) of gay and lesbian identities (1996). The formation of gay and lesbian identities are, therefore, mediated by a politics of visibility and invisibility and legibility and illegibility. In this regard, the heteronormativity of the representations I analyze in this chapter may serve to reinforce the hegemonic invisibility and illegibility of gay and lesbian identities. Nevertheless, there is a burgeoning gay and lesbian movement in India. See the pioneering work of Arondekar (2009) on homoerotic desire in a historical frame, and also Abraham (2004), Balachandran (2004), Bandyopadhyay (2007), Biswas (2007), Bose and Bhattacharya (2007), L. Cohen (1995), Gandhi (2007), Ghosh (2007), Merchant (2007), Mutneja (2007), Pandey (2004), Patel (1998, 2007), Reddy (2007), Shahani (2008), Srivastava (2004), and Thadani (1996) on same-sex and gay and lesbian erotics in contemporary India.

11. The interdisciplinary scholarship on affect is voluminous. See the work of Ahmed (2004), Brennan (2004), Clough (2007), Deleuze 1997, Deleuze and Guattari (1983), Gregg and Seigworth (2010), Massumi (2006), Protevi (2009), Sedgewick (2003), K. Stewart (2007), and Thrift (2008) for some examples.

12. Haug also cautions us that commodity aesthetics form just one "functional complex, one aspect among others in our social reality" (1986, 138).

13. To clarify: while many of my informants could afford some of the less expensive commodities that had come into the market (such as cosmetics, some varieties of packaged foods, and small appliances like mixers, gas stoves, and electric fans), they were unable to purchase most of the high-end durable consumer goods advertised, such as automobiles, air conditioners, and expensive clothing.

14. Omvati's discomfort with the relationship between her son and daughter-in-law is not unusual in the context of the politics of extended families in North India. See, for instance, Raheja and Gold's discussion of the tensions surrounding conjugality in rural North India (1994). However, it also articulated with the new visibility of conjugality in the public sphere.

15. See Rajagopal's (1999) study for an excellent analysis of the KS ads.

16. My ethnographic observations are corroborated by quantitative data collected by a Pathfinders Survey, according to which 41.8 percent of a total sample size of 10,955 individuals believed that "Western influence on TV programmes is harmful to Indian culture" (Pathfinders India, 1998, table 2.8.7).

17. For superb analyses of conventions of erotic representation in Bollywood film, see the work of Dwyer (2000) and Uberoi (1997).

18. Recent representations of the sexualized male body are not unprecedented: male stars have frequently been eroticized, for instance, Shammi Kapoor, a 1960s star who apparently drew inspiration from the gyrating Elvis Presley (see Rai 1994). Recent films feature actors like Salman Khan, whose buffed body is explicitly staged as an object of erotic desire for male and female spectators.

19. In Hindi films released around this time, erotic desire continued to be subsumed within discourses of romance, and premarital and extramarital erotic relations continued to be depicted as transgressive. Some notable examples of such films were *Astitiva* (Rahul Sughand Productions, 2000), *Salaam Namaste*, *Corporate* (V One Entertainment, 2006), *Hum tum*, and *Kabhi alvida naa kehna* (Dharma Productions, 2006).

20. Anjali Monteiro, of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, in Bombay, linked this new focus on intimacy in the talk shows of the 1990s with emerging notions of selfhood. She explained: "Traditionally, the distinction between individual identity and group identity was not so sharp. Today there is an emphasis on moulding and presenting oneself. The self is something you must work on and talk shows provide an opportunity to look at yourself through others' experiences" (Anupama Chandra, "Opening New Channels of Conversation," *India Today*, March 15, 1995). Indeed, other theorists have also linked a preoccupation with intimacy with the emergence of bourgeois forms of selfhood, for instance, Foucault's (1984) analysis of the history of sexuality and the constitution of the modern subject. While I hesitate to generalize that the recent preoccupation with intimacy and erotics in television programs heralds the birth of new subjectivities in urban India, representations of sexuality and, in particular, erotics, seem to have served as "a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms" (Giddens 1992, 14).

21. These anxieties were also mirrored in and perhaps fueled by television serials that focused on tensions between the conjugal unit and the extended family. These anxieties continue to be a staple of many television serials. Serials like *Kuch jhuki palkein* (Sony Entertainment Television) and *Gharana* (Zee TV) focus centrally on conflicts between the two, even as others (such as *Justajoo* [Zee TV]) depict the trials, but also the clandestine pleasures, of extramarital sexual relationships. *Justajoo*, in fact, is about an incestuous extramarital relationship, and profoundly problematizes dominant discourses of family and kinship by making explicit the politics of desire between members of a family.

22. In some Hindi films released at this time, for instance *Drishti* (1991, directed by Govind Nihalani) or *Paroma* (1985, directed by Aparna Sen), which narrate the erotic awakening of married women through extramarital relationships, women are severely punished for pursuing erotic pleasure. It is also important to note, however, that these films are not conventional Bollywood films, but are "crossover" films made by directors who have established their reputations in "middle cinema."

23. This is corroborated by researchers David Page and William Crawley, who report

that middle-class students in Ahmedabad did not find Savi to be "bold." According to Page and Crawley, asked whether *Hasratein* was bold, one student replied: "It is bold, but Savitri does not act bold. She is like a traditional wife." Another responded: "She respects everyone and teaches me to respect everyone" (2001, 166).

24. See Giddens's reminder that sexuality might also be "worrying, disturbing, fraught with tensions" (1992, 177).

25. I wish to thank Sudipta Kaviraj and Kumkum Sangari for their help with clarifying the ideas presented in this paragraph.

{ 7 } LOUISA SCHEIN

HOMELAND BEAUTY

Transnational Longing and Hmong American Video

Since 1975, Hmong highlanders from Laos have been arriving in the West, after the withdrawal of the United States from intervention in the Vietnam War. Those Hmong who became refugees had assisted the CIA in a covert anticommunist effort within Laos. The failure of this effort necessitated political exile, especially for those who had served as guerillas. Minorities in their homelands, they had dwelled on the high mountain slopes, practicing swidden agriculture, speaking the Hmong language, and retaining distinctive styles of dress and a highly elaborated religiocultural system.[1] Through their alliance with the United States, they had hoped, ultimately in vain, to gain a greater measure of political self-determination within Laos.[2] Instead, perhaps 250,000 Hmong now reside in various localities across the United States. Smaller communities are found in France, Australia, Canada, and French Guiana.

It was with haste and regret that Hmong families left their homes, and, even after more than two decades have passed, the longing of many of the middle and elder generations for the Asian, agrarian lifestyles they have lost remains alive. For some Hmong, whose residence in the United States has eventuated in citizenship and a degree of economic security, this longing has taken the form of nostalgia touring—to Laos, Thailand, China, even Vietnam—in search of a sense of connectedness to the lives from which they were so abruptly severed.[3] Hmong still live agrarian lives in villages in all of these countries. Travelers from the Hmong diaspora also seek out coethnic contacts in major cities, such as Bangkok, Vientiane, and Kunming.

Voyages to Asia may involve family visits, tours, business trips, or a combination of these. What is significant here is that, in the case of more than a few men, Asian sojourns have involved sexual trysts, longer-term relationships, or even marriages with homeland Hmong women. Liaisons of varying durations between Hmong men from the West and their coethnic women in Asia have become the micropractices that constitute an increasingly gendered structure of relations with a feminized homeland. Moreover, eroticized structures of feeling have come to characterize both the actual relations and the symbolics of Hmong diasporic engagements with home.

My problematic here concerns media practices in and around an eroticized homeland. Dozens of the primarily male Hmong travelers to Asia are involved in the production of videos that constitute diverse representations of the lands they call home. These tapes, shot, edited, and marketed all by Hmong, take their place in the context of a huge Hmong media scene in which hundreds of newspapers, magazines, audio cassettes, CDs, music videos, and videotapes are produced and sold, all within the Hmong market. Video production emerged specifically from the much larger and older music scene, which features Hmong bands around the world, as well as recordings of traditional music on cassettes and CDs, distributed throughout Hmong diasporic communities. Videos are made by a range of amateur and semiprofessional producers, many of whom have established companies with names such as Hmong World Productions, Asia Video Productions, Vang's International Video Productions, and ST Universal Video. These VHS tapes, and more recently DVDs, are in the Hmong language and are intended exclusively for intraethnic consumption.[4] Shrink-wrapped and usually copyrighted, they sell for ten to thirty dollars apiece. Although usually produced for profit, they are not backed by corporate or other advertising interests. Produced almost exclusively in the United States, they are typically marketed at Hmong ethnic festivals, groceries, and video shops, and by mail order domestically and abroad.

Among this large volume of videos are dramas, martial arts thrillers, documentaries on important events, performance or music videos of singing and dancing, historical reconstructions, and Asian feature films dubbed into Hmong. A moderate proportion concern Asian homeland sites. There are tapes that portray Laos, the birthplace of almost all Hmong Americans and the locus of the secret war orchestrated by the CIA, in which Hmong fought as guerillas during the Vietnam War. There are those set in Thailand, where Hmong sojourned in refugee camps before being granted permission to migrate to the West. And there are those that document a mythologized

land of origins in the mountains of southwest China, where filmmakers encounter their ethnic counterparts, the Miao.[5] Several genres regularly appear on the market: narrated travelogues on the order of homemade tourism videos, stories and folktales enacted in "traditional" homeland sites, historical reconstructions and tracings of migration routes, dramatic restagings of war and flight, martial arts action stories, contemporary (melo)dramas concerning Asian lives, documents of festivals, pageants, and other events, and an avalanche of music videos. In many cases, the attraction of the tape is precisely in its traversing of untraveled but oh-so-familiar territories—the mountains of China, Vietnam, and Burma.

Subject Formation and Ethnotextual Reading

This chapter is about reading the video texts of Hmong diaspora from Asia to the West, about exploring the ways that videos communicate Hmong migrant subjectivities, but more important, about conceiving of videos and other media as *imbricated* with migrant subjectivities, as contributing to the shaping of certain transnational sensibilities. In this process, which I refer to as transnational subjectification, gender is closely implicated. The gendered structure of transnational relations is not separable from the forms of representation that Hmong consume. With and beyond gender, however, we enter the more elusive domain of erotics—of structures of desire that suffuse Hmong video and other media, potentially inciting longings around the homeland that are sexual or sexualized.

There is a definite relationship between media consumption and erotic practice, but how that relationship works in specific instances remains a subject for careful ethnographic inquiry. What I present here is part of a larger project that includes multisite ethnographic work on the production, distribution, and consumption of Hmong videos in the context of other processes of Hmong transnational cultural production.[6] In the course of research, I interview producers, performers, and scriptwriters about their visions and their particular production practices. I visit stores, festivals, video companies, and other sites where videos are sold, and I shop alongside Hmong customers. I talk to audience members and I watch videos with them in their homes. Sometimes I catalogue entire video collections to get at the range of consumer tastes. I take the videos home as well and watch them through my own eye.

I want to perform here what I have called an ethnotextual approach to the contents of the videos. Figuring diasporic cultural products such as Hmong videos in terms of their transnational effects calls for a practice of close

reading, of situated interpretation. Such reading practices are by necessity imaginative and creatively engaged with the heteroglossia that constitutes video reception. I watch and read the videos from a site of ethnographic entanglement with those whose subject positions allow a more seamless identification with the films. I pursue intertextual interpretations, charting the unspoken dialogues between different video genres and locating them in the wider play of cultural signification that exceeds the video medium. Forms of folklore, textures of festival and costume, and modes of homeland representation all figure in the making of video meanings, as do conversation upon informal conversation about the works and their making.

The terrain of Hmong American cultural politics has become irrevocably intertwined with media texts, as have Hmong erotic subjectivities. Media texts should be seen as embedded in sexual cultures and in turn as constituting and reproducing them. It is not surprising that Hmong homeland nostalgia should be saturated with eroticism, for a disappearing sexual culture constitutes a cherished part of what is ambivalently recalled about the lands called home. Writing about the construction of sexual desires, sexuality theorist David Halperin asserts that "we must train ourselves to recognize conventions of feeling as well as conventions of behavior and to interpret the intricate texture of personal life as an artifact, as the determinate outcome, of a complex and arbitrary constellation of cultural processes" (1993, 426). For migrants engaged in homeland erotics, we could say that the potential for lands distanced through exile to become sites for recuperated passions produces a reconfigured structure of intimacy.

To get at structures of intimacy in the polyvalent domain of media, a domain that promises both multisensory stimulation and narrative closure, I too consume videos. In the course of my acts of viewing—and I am one of a tiny handful of non-Hmong who view these videos at all—my own desiring subjectivity is implicated. My moments of pleasure are cross-cut with voices of critique, sharpening my awareness of the politics of my white, American woman's eye as it is cast upon these texts and images. Ethnotextual reading, then, means reading alongside and as an interlocutor for Hmong viewers; it connotes an anthropologist's encounter with culturally embedded materials and regards the particularity of *my* locations as intertwined with my long-term engagement with *Hmong* particularities. Just as my standpoint shifts in the course of dialogues and moments of viewing, so too do I speak in varying interpretive registers.

Analyzing Media and Diaspora

Scholars of Southeast Asian refugees have emphasized the emotional tones and social functions of grassroots media in coping with the turbulence of dislocation. The musicologist Adelaida Reyes (1999) found Vietnamese refugee music both in the camps and in the United States to be a "mirror" of the refugee experience, while performance specialist Dwight Conquergood (1988) analyzed the therapeutic functions of "health theater" in Hmong refugee camps. The anthropologist Jeffery MacDonald stressed the role of Iu Mien video exchange in cultural preservation and in the constitution of a "global village" (1997, 242), while the anthropologist Jo Ann Koltyk's analysis of the consumption of Hmong videos, based on her ethnographic study of a Wisconsin Hmong community, foregrounded the kinds of cultural conversations that occur around watching the videos, as well as the potential for video and other technologies "to create a sense of solidarity and ethnic identity among peoples at a transnational level, irrespective of place or geography" (1998, 129).

Solidarity is indeed a vital artifact of the communications possibilities of such grassroots technologies. Hmong who watch videos of their coethnics in other parts of the world come to think of themselves as ever more unified across distances not only of space but also of dialect, costume style, form of livelihood, and other diacritics of cultural identity. There is great emotional investment in these newly forged unities, but they are unities that are produced only in defiance of the global asymmetries that structure the Hmong diaspora. Dealings between Hmong in the West and Hmong in Asia are highly conditioned by the fact that it is the most far-flung migrants who have the resources and opportunities to travel and to embark on business ventures in order to extract profits from their homelands. Moreover, it is Hmong Americans who are the bearers of camcorders positioning those in Asia as earthbound peasants, objects of pleasure under their gaze, and it is in the leisurely moments of urban lives that Hmong Americans flick on their VCRs to watch the spectacle of rural life and agricultural labor in Asian mountains—many residents of which are too poor to have VCRs themselves.[7]

Such asymmetries are also evident in the actual relations of video production. It is Hmong Americans who are the owners of media technology and producers and directors of the videos. Not only are they the ones traveling to Asia with their camcorders and crews, they are also, in a kind of offshore, "flexible" approach to production (Ong 1997, 62–66), involving many Asian

Hmong in their enterprises. These involvements take many forms. Hmong American producers may hire their crews and actors on site in Thailand or Laos. They may choose a popular Hmong/Miao singer or dancer in any of these countries and promote them as a phenomenon with special allure for nostalgic Hmong American consumers. Of late, one of the most lucrative ventures in the industry is that of Hmong entrepreneurs buying the rights to feature films out of Hong Kong, Thailand, China, or even India and dubbing them into Hmong language. The mundane work of translation and voice-over may be subcontracted to their coethnics in Asia since labor costs are so much lower. Such relations make emphatically clear that the study of diasporic media in a transnational frame needs to hold the production of solidarity in conceptual tension with its structuring by economic inequality.

Asian Women and the Semiotics of the (Hmong) Male Gaze

If the relations of production of Hmong transnational media reveal the disparities entailed in the globally uneven economy, gender only underscores the irreducibility of difference. As I have said, Hmong men from the West are, in recent years, increasingly traveling to Asia in search of sexual liaisons, mistresses, wives, and second wives among their coethnics in the homeland. Their economic power translates directly into the social power to court, bed, and wed very young Hmong women anxious for cash for their families or an opportunity to immigrate for themselves. Resonant with the time-honored East-West practice of picture, catalogue, and mail-order brides, regimes of video representation regularly picture such voiceless and powerless women as objects of a cruising type of gaze that surveys unwitting faces singled out by the framing power of the camera lens.

Such privilege can be seen in the opening to *China Part 3* (1995), a successful video by Su Thao that follows the visit of a delegation of Hmong American men to a festival of their coethnics in China's southern Yunnan province. Like so many Hmong-made travelogues and documentaries, the video is lavishly ornamented with women—usually in ethnic costume, often portrayed in bashful close-ups of their faces. In the opening sequence, which surveys the content of the film in some thirty brief clips, fully half of the shots are of women. Intercut with such festival scenes as pans of the crowd, bullfighting, pole-climbing, and inaugural ribbon-cutting are shot after shot of women dancing, women walking or riding busses to the festival, women accompanying the Hmong Americans, women watching from the audience, and women as disembodied faces, unknowingly submitted to the intrusion of the zoom, surveyed one by one like commodities in a catalogue. Lest the

subtext of catalogue shopping be too subtle for some viewers, Su Thao is figured frequently in flirtatious conversation with women, and there is a recurrent scene of the ball toss, a traditional courtship game, except now it is between local young women and middle-aged, trench-coated Hmong American men.

That literal cruising is part of the content of such videos is indicated by scenes depicting interrogations as to young women's clan names—a first consideration of the clan-exogamous Hmong when identifying potential partners. For Hmong anywhere in the world, sharing a surname means that marriage is taboo and even sex is considered revoltingly incestuous. In many of Su Thao's videos, including *China Part 3*, we see him in the frame directly asking a girl for her clan affiliation to assess the parameters of her marriageability. In another video about China, the idiom of courtship is made more explicit. Three rural young women are arrayed on a hilltop, colorfully dressed before a backdrop of panoramic scenery. The cameraman asks: "Will you sing a song for me to take back to America to find you a man?" And then: "Are you girls still young and unmarried?"[8]

The girl who is apparently the eldest, but still appearing to be in her mid-teens at most, utters: "Yes, we don't have 'it' yet."

"Thank you very much," he replies. The camera hesitates, zooms in on the face of the speaker, then pans to the other two girls. They smile awkwardly and smooth their skirts and aprons self-consciously. The cameraman, now self-appointed matchmaker, narrates: "These are three of our Hmong girls. They are going to sing and I'm going to record a couple songs to take back to our men in America." He chuckles audibly, then asks one of them the key question: "What clan are you?"

"Zhou clan," the eldest offers. Then they proceed to sing, not knowing where to cast their eyes. They appear disoriented at the staging of what, in face-to-face courtship, would have been a dialogue but now has been rendered a one-way self-marketing opportunity. Their ambivalence shapes their tentative facial expressions. Again, like catalogue brides, they communicate, but only from a position of what Ara Wilson (1988, 119) has called "rhetorical vulnerability" in which they are commandeered to present themselves in codes not of their own making to audiences not visible to them.

The bulk of Hmong video, then, is embedded within a masculinist discourse, reflected in the eye of the privileged migrant's camera, a discourse that has affinities with time-honored codes of Orientalist representation of the East (Said 1979). To be sure, the vast majority of Hmong video producers are themselves men, but the predominant gaze upon women in so many

Hmong videos goes beyond such a straightforwardly gendered relationship to conventions around the masculinized filmic gaze in general (Mulvey 1989), and around the overwhelming representation of the East as feminine, sexually exotic, available, and seductive. Like Malek Alloula's (1986) Algerian women in French colonial postcards, the women pictured in Hmong videos intimate a kind of haremlike erotic excess, both through the images of their countlessness and in the recurrent fetishization of their ornate costume. Moreover, their plurality and the way they are casually browsed by the camera's surveying eye also promises what the social theorist Anthony Giddens terms an "episodic" form of sexuality, one that "denies the very emotional dependence that fuels it" (1992, 129). In this instance, that emotional dependence might be writ large as a perduring need for homeland connectedness, one that is disavowed precisely through a more discrete, episodic, detached consumption of women.

The trope of the Asian woman as erotic object was renewed and intensified during just that moment that produced the Hmong diaspora, the Vietnam War, and in just that Asian site to which Hmong travel most frequently, Thailand. As the information studies scholar Lynn Thiesmeyer has pointed out, Thailand and Southeast Asia in general have remained sites of a tremendous volume of sexual exploitation of women, whether within Asia or through their export to the West, but this frequency of Western abuse is masked by a dominant discourse in which "Asians actively procure and seduce" while "westerners get seduced" (1999, 83). Thiesmeyer explicates the way Western regimes of representation rob women of their self-representation while staging their complicity in sexual liaisons: "Seduction is a symbology used to implicate the victim in her own abuse by removing her from her own body and voice in the realm of another's discursive images and text. A major effect of the transference of the actual Asian body into a symbology of seduction is the convenient silencing of the woman herself" (Thiesmeyer 1999, 70).

Homeland Traffic as Text

Beyond the literal documents of available Asian women, another Hmong genre in which the dream of the conquest of homeland women figures centrally is that of the dramatic story in which the pains of transnational disjuncture meld with the emotional-erotic fulfillment attained by Hmong American men. This genre has been popularized in a video colloquially referred to as "Dr. Tom." It was in a Hmong-run beauty salon in Fresno that I first heard of what was then a two-part drama formally titled *Yuav Tos Txog*

Hnub Twg (How long until the day I am waiting for?, 1995). In the months after its release, the work was almost universally touted by Hmong Americans as the most popular Hmong video in the U.S. market.[9] Shot in Thailand on the spur of the moment, with a shoestring budget and an improvised script, the blockbuster was the creation of Ga Moua, previously well known as a songwriter in the Hmong music scene and a frequent traveler to Asia.

By Moua's account, it was a Thai driver who first suggested that he try his hand at video, and that a tale of contemporary significance might hit it big. Spending only $2,000, Moua assembled local relatives and Thai acquaintances to concoct a poignant plot with a believable cast of characters, enacting a scenario that would make Hmong viewers think twice. The story combines time-honored Hmong folklore motifs, including the tragic orphan boy and the exquisite torment of unconsummated love, with newfangled themes of transnational relationships gone wrong.

Set in a refugee camp near the Mekong River, the opening scenes of the original *Dr. Tom* feature a beautiful young woman, Nkauj Iab (pronounced "Ngao Ia"), who is just falling in love with her childhood friend, Tub Nus (pronounced "Tou Nou"), a foster brother who has been raised in her family since his parents met a terrible death at the hands of a gang of Thai predators as they crossed the Mekong out of Laos. He has grown up to be an exemplary son and brother, his first appearance one in which he offers to help as she prepares a meal. He next appears ambling empty-handed through the camp and discovers her pushing a heavy cart. He valiantly falls in beside her to alleviate the weight of her labor. For a Hmong man to offer his brawn to a young woman in the toil of daily duties is a courtship idiom that recurs both in Hmong custom and in myriad videos. His build is slight, and he is clean and well-groomed in a bold, black and white, plaid long-sleeved shirt and off-white pants. His voice is mature, but not as low as that of an older man who might be less innocent in his intentions. Such a man will appear soon, most often garbed in black, a marked contrast to the whites worn by the younger suitor.

Soon the neophyte lovers leave the cart and stray off the road. Despite the fact that they are living in a refugee camp, they have managed to find some privacy in a classically lovely natural setting. They walk by a river, lean against trees, sit on rocks, all the while exchanging the kind of tentative dialogues that are conventional to Hmong courtship. She queries, "There are a lot of girls in the camp, do you have a friend?" "It's not time yet; when I do, you'll be the first to know!" he replies. "You have to tell me or I'll be angry at you," she retorts. But he tells her, "Just wait till the time comes." She feigns a

7.1. Nkauj Iab performs demureness while courting her local love interest.

huff and walks away, requiring him to pursue her to the foot of a giant tree where she keeps her back turned. "Are you mad at me?" he asks, communicating everything by daring to place a hand tentatively on her shoulder. "I've had someone in mind for a while now," he adds, "but I'm poor and I still live with your family. So I can't tell anyone. And I don't know if she is going to love me back. Do *you* have a friend?" She too is coy: "Yes, but I can't tell you." He entreats, "C'mon!" She replies, "When *you* tell *me* . . ." A touching and familiar Hmong love song in the pop genre is crooned in the background, further evoking the sentimentality of the scene.

Recurrent close-ups of Nkauj Iab's face allow the viewer to indulge in the sensuality of her beauty while the story line encourages watching her with longing through her new lover's eyes. She epitomizes desirability in a highly recognizable form of Hmong femininity. She wears her long black tresses flowing down her back, ordered only by a neat hairband that frames her features and reveals the sparkle of fancy earrings. Her eyebrows are plucked and she is made up with glossy lips for the camera. Her face and her figure are rounded and healthy, betraying none of the hunger and physical stress that camp life might have entailed. Her blouse is a red and white striped shirt in Western style, over a turquoise patterned Thai-style sarong—stock dress for

Hmong women once they left Laos. She speaks in a soft and exceptionally high voice, redolent with the vulnerability of youth. She coyly averts her eyes, feigning bashfulness, even as she is the one to initiate a confession of their blossoming emotions. The fusion of restraint with willingness, a courtship trope in and beyond Hmong romantic culture, places her squarely in the role of love object, one honorable enough to be exalted in the script as unassailably sympathetic. Her vulnerability will turn to victimhood at the hands of a man more positioned to exploit his socioeconomic advantage, but for the moment a passionate intimation of reciprocal feelings is staged.

The next scenes emphasize that the brother-turned-boyfriend is diligent and strong. He chops wood with great force and then is shown walking away from their house telling someone he is going to do wage labor for the Thais. He has donned a local-styled broad-brimmed straw hat, indicating that he will be toiling in the harsh sun. This honest physicality sets up the contrast that will mark the entry of his counterpart, Dr. Tom. Tom will be distinguished by technology and leisure, the emblems of his relative wealth. As the boyfriend heads off to his toil, the scene cuts abruptly to an approaching airplane, producing a deafening roar and glinting against the blue sky as it is seen from below. In case the jet itself was not menacing enough, the next scene is of a violent thunder and lightning storm, ominous with gusty wind and torrents of rain. Nkauj Iab watches from her doorstep, sheltered by the overhang of the thatched roof.

The rain ceases and a car is seen approaching, honking brashly. We have not seen Tom yet; he has been ensconced in two forms of transportation that are unavailable to the camp refugees who do everything on foot, exposed to the elements. The car stops and the camera focuses on the unpaved earth outside the passenger door where an ornately patterned cowboy boot descends slowly and touches ground. The camera pans up Tom's body to reveal quintessential Americana: blue jeans (tucked into the showy boots), a large camcorder draped on the shoulder, a white shirt, a black tailored blazer, an oversized, garish necktie printed with sexy images of Marilyn Monroe, dark shades, and slicked-back hair. He is stocky, clearly not a regular physical laborer, and not particularly handsome. In the life of the *Dr. Tom* series, the protagonist, played by the director Ga Moua himself, will become known for his silly clothes, contrived to impress ignorant Hmong in Asia, but fully recognizable as utterly lacking in style to bemused Hmong American audiences. The first signal of this syndrome is the overdone cowboy boots together with the ridiculous necktie.

7.2. Dr. Tom emerges from a car, flaunting Marilyn Monroe tie, shades, blazer, and modern technologies.

There is a moment of silence, then Tom's deep, commanding voice is heard, just before his face is finally revealed: "Mmmmm, so this is Thailand. . . . Just as the heart desires." He glances around with relish at a background of lush plants and mountains, no people or structures in sight. With drama, the heavy drumbeat of a Hmong rock song winds up as Tom begins his pretentious swagger toward the camp. The song pauses for a moment as he meets his sidekick in the script, dubbed "Jerry" in reference to the comic characters Tom and Jerry. Jerry is a local, the comic fool in the story, who promptly performs his subordination by relieving Tom of all his weighty baggage, even the camcorder, leaving Tom, the high-status guest, to walk freely in ungainly American strides while displaying his technological potency by talking on a cellular phone.

Meanwhile the local boyfriend has gotten off work, and as he shops to spend his hard-earned wages on a gift for Nkauj Iab, the music switches back to a gentle folksy Hmong tune. She is at her doorstep sewing demurely, and she greets him with bashful smiles, then mistily opens up the slippers he has given her, but only discreetly after he has gone inside. While she ponders her affection, the camera switches back to Tom, who is videotaping his way

through the camp to the accompaniment of more Hmong rock music. He convenes a publicity event at the camp primary school, giving away supplies to schoolchildren who stand in long lines and are coached to say "thank you" to Dr. Tom from America.

In the next scene, Tom's touristy videotaping is arrested by Jerry's introduction of Nkauj Iab in the marketplace. He is immediately struck by her, and arranges to visit her at her home, commenting to Jerry as she departs, "Oooh, are girls in Thailand pretty!" Later, he approaches her house, now dressed down with sneakers and no tie. He sneaks a shot of her mother embroidering at the doorstep, then asks to see Nkauj Iab. A telling scene ensues while the mother is inside: Tom perches awkwardly on a very low stool, removes his shades to shoot a quick nostalgic clip of the traditional embroidery sitting in its basket, then painstakingly repositions his sunglasses and vainly smoothes down his hair. He has become a self-conscious suitor. Nkauj Iab emerges from the house, smiling and friendly, attractively dressed in her fourth sarong outfit of the film. As we have learned in an earlier scene of a dinner conversation, she wants very much to go to America, but she does not yet realize what Tom's scheme is for her.

Nostalgia and the Mediated Fantasy of Recovery

I suggest that videos such as *Dr. Tom* are embedded in the remembering of a sexual culture that still animates Hmong American longings. The visuals in *Dr. Tom* convey a luxuriant sensibility: they ooze with the nuances of a special desire. Nkauj Iab epitomizes a recuperated Hmong femininity, one that has been put under threat by the Americanization of Hmong migrant women. As such it can be read as normative, a critique of Westernization. As the critic Susan Stewart puts it, "Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological. The past it seeks has never existed except as a narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack" (1993, 23). The lure of this girl is the lure of nostalgia mingled with male longing, longing not only for that feminized icon of home, but for an idealized and lost set of sexual mores, the heart-stopping need for one's object of obsession, and the privilege to make one's conquest.

The prurient, stalking sensibility evoked earlier, then, does not do justice to the putative tenderness that also enchants the fantasy of homeland liaisons. Such fantasies are anchored to places that are imbued with a particular romantic sensibility. It is as if the passions of bygone youth are conflated with the affection for their lost land. The rituals of courtship, where men

wooed and loved very young and innocently beautiful girls, come to constitute a quintessential facet of culture that is imperiled by flight to the United States.

Whereas diasporic loss is irremediable, then, it is not so in the fantasy world of narrative videos such as *Dr. Tom*, where storybook loves can be found for those with migrant privilege. The cartoonish character of Tom is determined to fulfill his fantasy of dormant romance regardless of the Hmong wife he already has in America. Despite his dubious moral fiber, it is he who is the victor over Tub Nus in winning the hand of Nkauj Iab. He begins negotiations immediately, seducing her family with promises of money and migration opportunities. Mother, grandmother, and eventually father abandon their last promise to Tub Nus's parents, made when the parents were in the throes of death. Instead of looking out for Tub Nus's welfare, they come around to the offer of economic comfort implied in making Tom kin. Nkauj Iab resists vociferously, but she has become a pawn in a deal-making that far exceeds her feelings. The video features a traditional wedding in which male elders seal the girl's fate.

As for Tom, he has procured a few nights of bliss in bed with his new wife, nights only enhanced by her initial reluctance and her eventual surrender to his embrace. His pleasure is short-lived, however, for his economic stature is a fraud. In desperation, he steals away from a street restaurant where he is entertaining Nkauj Iab in style with noodles and bottled soda, to furtively call his wife in America, hoping that she'll wire him more cash. His request is met with ire, as his wife barks that he has absconded with their family's welfare money. Tom's facade has crumbled and he will have to skulk home or face discovery. How can the text avoid restaging the paradigmatic loss of homeland that was so excruciating the first time?

A surprising scene occurs just as Tom bids farewell to his bride, concealing from her that his money has run out. They had consummated their marriage and lived as husband and wife for a brief time. They sit close together on a bench before a lush green background. Tom wants to embrace his bride with one arm, and she does not resist. Indeed, in contrast with her earlier distaste for Tom, Nkauj Iab, in her most purringly submissive voice, suddenly expresses longing for Tom. While he fans her affectionately, she renounces her earlier hesitation and proclaims regret that she had not loved him sooner. She now does not know how she can wait through his impending absence. Tom moves in closer to hold her. The scenario is irresolvably ambiguous. Does Nkauj Iab make this proclamation in calculated antici-

pation of her husband's departure, as a strategy for ensuring that he comes back for her? Or have her feelings actually undergone such a dramatic shift?

The diverse readings that Hmong audiences have offered of this scene confirm its ambiguity. Several different Hmong recounted to me a basic principle of Hmong sexual culture: such a turnaround—from adamant rejection of the man's advances to an almost slavish love—can be considered the product of the conjugal bed, of the desires awakened in formerly innocent women when they discover the pleasures of marital sex. "She loves him now because she was a virgin. Now that she's married him, she has to love him," said a grandfather in his fifties. A mother of grown daughters, on a visit from Thailand to see in-laws, emphasized pragmatics: "She has no choice: since she has to go with him, she loves him." Not all women expressed unqualified belief in this tenet, however, but regarded it instead as an ideological position of those who would enjoin women to accept their arranged matrimonial fates: "Hmong *say*," a professional Hmong woman in her thirties noted with a tone of cynical dismissiveness, "that once a woman sleeps with a man she will love him for life!"

If we accept the literality of Nkauj Iab's professed longing, that she has indeed come to care for Tom, and we read it in light of the transnational context in which the relationship is developing, two meanings come into focus. First, Tom has gotten not just any sex, but homeland sex, which, at least at the level of textual representation, can never be reducible to some kind of bodily gratification free of diasporic significations. Nkauj Iab's reciprocation of Tom's desire can be seen as metonymic for the successful recovery of the homeland, that impossible object of nostalgia whose actual recovery would be just as incredible as the turnaround in Nkauj Iab's feelings. It is at this moment of completion that the male migrant sensibility of the text is most strongly manifested. Never simply about sexual adventuring or marital conquest in the homeland, it is about a woman who loves back, for if she doesn't there is no salve to that persistent and painful sense of loss that haunts refugee stories.

Seductive Emigration

There is a second type of reading of Nkauj Iab's sudden emotional turnaround that concerns a complementary longing to that of Hmong men for reclaiming their women. It is the longing of Nkauj Iab to leave the refugee camp and migrate to America. Tom metaphorizes this object of desire. Despite her existing romantic inclinations in Thailand, from the outset, Nkauj

Iab's receptiveness to getting to know this interloper at all is based on where he comes from. In this dynamic, Tom has become the seducer, and the effectiveness of his conquest is based not on his provocation of bodily desire but on his proffering of migrant opportunity. Tom's entire presentation has been geared to convincing Hmong in the camp that he does in fact stand for this possibility. His slick attire, his charitable handouts at the school, his descriptions of his transnational business, and his flashing around of cash all seduce locals into believing in a persona that is much more than any masculine attractiveness. Seduction, writes Baudrillard, is "the body operating by artifice and not by desire" (1999, 134). "Seduction is always more remarkable and more sublime than sex, for it is seduction that we prize above all. . . . Everything is at play in the vertigo of this reversal, *this transsubstantiation of a sex into signs which is the secret of all seduction*" (1999, 134–35).

Tom has won Nkauj Iab through the staging of his wealth, power, and availability. And she now wants him physically as an effect of this fragile edifice that is crumbling underneath him even as he restages it to seal Nkauj Iab's commitment. "I have to go, but I'll hurry up and file papers to come and get you," he promises disingenuously. And then, as if acknowledging that the wait will be interminable, for he has neither the resources nor the marital status to bring her legally to the United States, he adds, "When I'm gone, please be patient." Part I ends tragically, with Nkauj Iab totally alone in the camp, Tub Nus having been called to go to America, and Nkauj Iab's parents having moved out to settle in a Thai village. Walking each day to the mail delivery room, she searches in vain for a letter from the chimeric Dr. Tom. Bereft but faithful, Nkauj Iab waits and waits.

The manipulation of appearances, exemplified by Tom's con, is, in fact, one of the aspects of the *Dr. Tom* script from which audiences derive a great deal of pleasure. Despite the tragic story line, young and old alike say they revel in the humor of Tom's campy clothes and effete affectations. It is almost a kind of class laughter in which Hmong Americans indulge as they puncture the artifice of his proclamations that he is the "richest Hmong in America," still single because he "studied so long for the Doctor degree," with a business that has offices in Bangkok, Chieng Mai, America, and soon Japan. As a narrative, the story of Tom's duplicity commingles sympathy for duped Hmong in Asia with the enjoyment of the genre of mistaken identity at another.

Moral Ambiguity and Media's Multivalence

The figure of Tom represents a deeply ambivalent heroic masculinity. The text revels in his prowess at playing a big shot with almost unbridled access to women, but at the same time it heaps derision upon him for his duplicitousness and his self-seeking ethos. The overt text must affirm this censure or risk being intolerable to the imagining of Hmong global solidarity. Indeed, the more didactic *Dr. Tom II* reveals the gradual demise of the evildoing Dr. Tom, as the director, Ga Moua, by his account, adjusted to the demands of audiences who wanted to see justice done. Nkauj Iab's first love makes it to America and goes to look up "Dr." Tom, who turns out to be nothing but a janitor in a white American doctor's office. Meanwhile, Tom deceives his first wife into believing he wants to make a new beginning and she takes him to her uncle for a loan to start a farm. With cash in hand he immediately absconds back to Thailand where he discovers that his homeland wife has learned of his lies, abandoned her marriage to him, and returned to her original boyfriend. Her parents curse him mercilessly.

Foiled, but now desperate for a homeland tryst, Tom tries in vain to impress many other women, all of whom let him know that they are no longer to be duped by men from America. In scene after scene, with mounting absurdity, his slick artifice is punctured. At one point he sits in a café, trying to convince a waitress that he speaks Russian. Not the stereotypical impressionable Hmong girl, she turns out to have studied Russian in school herself and promptly exposes him. Humiliated, he returns home, where he vents his frustration violently on his Hmong American wife. She in turn reports him for domestic abuse, and he ends up, in a dramatic climax, hunted down in his home by white and black cops with a search warrant. He tries in vain to hide in a corner, reduced to pathetic trembling, while his loyal sister tries to conceal his presence. Eventually he is discovered, spread eagled on the floor by the state authorities, then handcuffed and carted off to jail.

Clearly, *Dr. Tom* works as a pedagogical text, warning Hmong men of the perils of straying into the temptations of homeland relationships and cautioning Hmong women in Asia of the risks of succumbing to a con. It chastises marital infidelity, and portrays Tom as doubly economically exploitative: on the one hand, he makes off with his wife's meager welfare income, and on the other he flaunts it among refugee poor to coerce a reluctant family into marrying their daughter off to him. At this level, the story could not be more moralizing, and, indeed, Ga Moua espoused this intention when I asked him why he had made these films on what was, at

the time, an unprecedented theme that proved to be highly subversive to Hmong American men. "I wanted them to stop doing it! They should be shamed!" he exclaimed with passion. Moua also told me that his videos had played a role in educating Hmong families in Thailand about the dangers of predatory Hmong American men. Widespread viewing of the video in Thailand and Laos, he asserted, was part of what made Asian Hmong look with a more savvy and suspicious eye on their coethnic visitors from the West.

Hmong American audiences also analyze the film as conveying a useful politico-moral message. Over and over again, when I asked why they thought *Dr. Tom* was so popular, Hmong viewers answered: "Because it's real." Not that that story really took place, they hastened to add, but that that kind of thing happens all the time. It was refreshing to be able to laugh at such a shameless predator, and to symbolically reseal bonds with relatives in Southeast Asia through vicarious sympathy for their exploitation. Deeply concerned, Hmong viewers I spoke with envisioned a social impact for the film. "The movie warns men about what they shouldn't do when they go to Thailand or Laos," was an interpretation voiced commonly by women and men. Mixing media into daily life, "Dr. Tom" has become a household word, a trope for masculine misconduct in Asia. "Don't be a Dr. Tom when you go to Thailand!" has reportedly become a common admonition when Hmong American wives see their husbands off for trips to the East. The message: Any man is potentially a Dr. Tom, but *shouldn't be.*

That the message of Dr. Tom continues to retain a doubleness—a suggestive potential combined with a moral reprehension—is an artifact of media's polysemic character. Never is the didactic voice of the story line capable of completely eclipsing that more subtle incitement. One middle-aged Hmong man formulated this appeal in terms of the power of fantasy: "It's what many men want to do, but know that they can't." But, in actuality, they can, and the travel to Asia for second wives and mistresses is far from dwindling. To the contrary, despite heightened awareness of the problem on both sides of the Pacific, there are indications that the practice is increasing in scope, extending further into Laos and China.[10] *Dr. Tom* could not have made its point more strongly, but it cannot escape its character as a media artifact, its visual and aural viscosity that plays irresistibly on the sensorium. Steven Shaviro describes this process as follows: "Cinema invites me, or forces me, to stay within the orbit of the senses. I am confronted and assaulted by a flux of sensations that I can neither attach to physical presences nor translate into systematized abstractions. I am violently, viscerally affected by *this* image and *this* sound, without being able to have recourse to any frame of

reference, any form of transcendental reflection, or any Symbolic order. No longer does a signifying structure anticipate every possible perception; instead, the continual metamorphoses of sensation preempt, slip and slide beneath, and threaten to dislodge all the comforts and stabilities of meaning" (1993, 33). At the level of the senses, then, the cinematic effects of *Dr. Tom* continue to elude logocentrism, narrative, and conscience. Put another way, Nkauj Iab remains breathtakingly desirable in the frames of the camera regardless of how the story frames the abuse of her person.

In *Dr. Tom III*, Tom emerges from jail and is told by a friend that his wife has had multiple affairs, thus making his return to Thailand for a third time a more legitimate venture. But Tom is now much detested by people in Thailand. They accuse him of all the crimes of Hmong migrant malehood: "You Hmong Americans are always saying you are the top leader; how do we know who's really the one?" "You are supposed to come help the Hmong, but you only dally with Bangkok prostitutes." In one comic scene the vindictive hatred for Tom is sensationally dramatized: Tom's old friend Jerry hosts him at his home. Jerry goes into the secluded cooking area and makes a throat-cutting gesture to his wife. She emerges, raising a huge butcher knife over the back of Tom's neck as if readying to kill him. In the nick of time, Jerry intervenes and tells her surreptitiously that he meant for her to kill a chicken for Tom to eat, not to kill Tom himself. Locals also gouge him for money, demanding, for instance, that he pay a fee for the image of the rice fields that serves as backdrop to photos he is taking with friends. Over and over again they ask what he's going to do for Thailand. Amid Tom's mounting disgrace, a friend suggests that he go to Laos, and he utters elliptically, "Yes, I must go to Laos for I have not yet found love. The blood in my heart has not yet dried up."

In Laos, Tom's artifice is gradually restored. He feigns being a long-lost relative to some. He boasts that if he finds a girl who will marry him he will "put up a water tower and light things up like Las Vegas." And if he takes her to America she'll be able to "sit in the house and do nothing but make up her face like a doll." The girl he courts in the city of Vientiane, however, declines his advances, saying she wants to use her college education to go back to the village and help her people. Perhaps iconizing the dutiful cadre in the now-communist Lao regime, she doesn't care about being rich.

Finally Tom travels, on more and more primitive types of transportation, to a village remote enough that he can find a girl to wed. This time she is even more traditional, pictured working in the fields, wearing full-blown traditional Hmong highland costume rather than the Thai-style lowland attire

in which Nkauj Iab had been outfitted. He consummates the marriage by an orchestrated traditional abduction, right from the girl's doorstep, which her parents acknowledge as legitimate. He brings her to town and sets her up in an apartment, winning her regard by buying her a motorcycle. But he cannot give up his long-standing compulsion and continues womanizing. Short clips show him with five other women in a row—chatting, drinking beer, even helping one put on her makeup. The new wife's family persuades her to come home and abandon the marriage. She and her brother steal away, taking the motorcycle with them. Tom is once again disgraced. Surreptitiously chasing them through town, he finds a moment when they have left the motorcycle running to go make a quick purchase. Furtively but self-righteously, he rides away on it. But the vehicle is registered to his wife, and Tom is once again in trouble with the law.

Now arrested and jailed in Laos, he calls upon his American wife. Unbeknownst to Tom, the audience has been privy to her having an extended affair with a "Dr. Tony," a real Hmong doctor whom she met when he treated her for her wounds at the hands of the abusive Tom. Despite the fact that she looks older than Tom, wears ill-fitting clothes over her middle-aged figure, and has deep bags under her eyes from a life of discontent, other suitors are also knocking on her door. When she hears Tom's pleas to revive their relationship, however, she abruptly tells the latest suitor that "it's better to stick with the one you have." Dutifully, she bails Tom out. He comes home to Fresno and sheepishly makes a repentant speech: "Honey [in English], if you're thinking like I am, let's put the past behind us and reconcile. I'll tell my brothers and sisters; you go and tell your family. We can have a normal life and our children can have a mother and father. I promise you that from now on I will be your beloved husband and not go to Laos or Thailand ever again." With these proclamations, they are reunited, and, in the closing scene, are pictured walking arm in arm at the Hmong New Year festival in Fresno, she in full traditional costume, smiling into each other's eyes as if nothing had ever happened.

Remembering Cultures of Courtship and Marriage

One of the things that *Dr. Tom III* does more than the two preceding videos is condense the issues of clashing marriage and sexual mores produced in the Hmong diaspora. The video more deeply explores ongoing struggles around particular conventions of Hmong marital culture—marriage by abduction, polygyny, and adultery—than the previous two. Indeed, the sexual

conduct emblematized by Tom remains of contested moral standing for Hmong immigrants. That Tom procures his Lao bride by ritual kidnapping is a romantic recuperation of the custom whereby Hmong suitors could ambush their chosen partners, take them home, deflower them, and thereby secure consent from their parents to wed. Abduction marriage has been extremely controversial when practiced in the United States and has resulted in court cases around charges of statutory rape. But the cases have been deeply debated, since the possibility exists that a young woman may agentively deploy abduction as a way of garnering reluctant parents' consent to a marriage while saving face in terms of her virtue, face that would be lost were she to have openly eloped.[11] Yet abduction has also gone horribly awry in the United States, where sensationalized stories of rapes of kidnapped young Hmong women by Hmong gangs have haunted the press coverage of Hmong immigration.[12] *Dr. Tom III* offers the audience a more pristine staging of remembered abduction marriage, unclouded by the conflicting legal codes that have made all such dealings unbearably fraught as normativization within the United States proceeds apace.

Likewise, that matrimony remains Tom's objective, despite his being already married at home, opens up the issue of the moral standing of polygyny. Deeply disciplined by laws in the West that allow serial monogamy and permit only one wife, and by Christian censure against adultery, most Hmong have embraced such strictures in practice, all the while being aware of the countervailing tendencies within Hmong marital mores. A long-standing, highly legitimate institution of polygyny for Hmong men of privilege in Laos meant that a significant number of men, because of INS regulations, had had to divorce one or more wives in order to enter the United States. While monogamy is now the norm and ardently supported by most Hmong in the West, the memory of Laos as a place where polygyny was permitted, even prestigious, is still alive, the stuff of fantasy for some, of critique for others, and of recuperative practice for still others. Maintaining a second wife in Asia while the first resides in the West is a means to circumvent the moral-legal strictures not only of the United States but also of Asian countries.

For many, however, homeland erotics is not about the recuperation of polygyny but much more about short-term passionate trysts, or about the setting up of mistresses. That by *Dr. Tom III*, Tom's wife in the United States has also ventured into an adulterous relationship routinizes the practice as a tendency that marriages cannot avoid. One Hmong man, trained in U.S. law and attempting a cultural translation of Hmong marriage customs,

writes of the moral ambiguity around such moments of indulgence: "Adultery is thought to be the result of temptation and uncontrollable impulse.... Rationalization of this theory rests on the simple fact that God created men and women to be with one another. It is essential that men have feeling toward women in order that one may have a desire for the other. . . . The burden of proof is on the petitioner to show that adultery committed by the other spouse exceeded a tolerable threshold" (Thao 1986, 83). By offering this quote, I am suggesting not that legitimate extramarital sex is an essential part of Hmong culture, but rather that the (not uncontested) discourse defending it is being actively produced as one *characterization* of Hmong culture. This is a discourse that creates a moral space for which Asia then serves as the physical location, particularly for men. The discourse rests on a long-standing canonization of gender asymmetry in moral strictures, as reiterated in such anthropological statements as the following about Hmong living in Thailand: "Adultery can only take place where a married woman is involved, since polygyny and pre-marital sex are permissible. This means, in practice, that only women can commit adultery" (Tapp 1989, 26).

That the *Dr. Tom* series might serve as a vehicle for an open-ended exploration of shifting, transnationalized marriage mores is disavowed by the closing scene, in which protagonist and first wife are reconciled. Once again, Tom is readable in at least two ways. On the one hand, he appears to have learned his lesson, had his sense of monogamous marital responsibility in his country of domicile reinforced, and been chastened by his geographic and emotional loss of his loves in Asia. But on the other hand, in the course of his adventures, if only ephemerally, he has managed to have it all, indulged in all the myriad practices called up in romantic nostalgia: the beauty of the homeland, heightened economic stature, courtship, love of a young woman, polygyny, abduction marriage, and so on. That Tom's desire could have been reciprocated by the lovely Nkauj Iab serves to mediate the moral criticism directed at him at one level of the text.

Women's Mirth and the Problem of Audience

Dr. Tom's complexity of meanings reverberates through its reception. In discussing *Dr. Tom III*, the director Ga Moua recounts that he designed the ending that he did because people were too depressed by the first two videos. "I wanted to make the audiences happy," he explained, aware that the finale is of dubious credibility. But his efforts were not altogether convincing, since the didactic message could not override the actual account of what Tom had

gotten away with. Women who viewed the film repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the story line: "I would never have taken a guy back after he did that," they protested.

Women, in fact, are by many Hmong estimates the majority audience for the *Dr. Tom* series and other such narrative films about Asian relationships. There are several reasons for this. First, women, especially middle-aged and elderly women, are more likely to be without work, with more time to stay home, attuned to a video player. Second, these generations of women are more likely to lack English skills and hence appreciate the comforts of viewing media in their native language. Third, as many Hmong have put it, "Women like love stories; men like war stories and martial arts." Women in their twenties and younger, by contrast, will usually disavow any knowledge of such parochial forms of media, although they may have caught glimpses of *Dr. Tom* or other videos in their elders' living rooms. They favor mainstream television and Hollywood movies, but sometimes aver that Hmong movies are good resources for keeping up their Hmong language skills.

The enjoyment that women derive from watching Tom is multivalent and highly divergent by generation. What kind of pleasures might women derive from consuming such videos again and again? What they describe most often is the pleasure of laughing at Tom, his horrible wardrobe, his buffoonery. It is a kind of gendered laughter, a laughter of inversion, of the type described by Mikhail Bakhtin (1968), Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986), and Achille Mbembe (1992), in which the banality of those in power becomes an object of fascinating mirth for the less powerful. Moreover, the video series portrays Tom's masculine power as fragile, threatened, and ultimately untenable, premised as it is on his web of lies and falsities.

In another film on a related theme, *Niam a kaj* (roughly translated Mail-order bride), produced by Su Thao, but authored and codirected by Lee Xiong (one of the very few Hmong women in media production), a form of resistance on the part of women to men's abuse of their privilege—especially their adulterous and polygynous privilege—is explicitly dramatized. A young woman in Thailand is married off by arrangement between her own and her groom's parents to a Hmong man in the United States. The groom is unwilling to marry, since he is in love with a Hmong American woman, but is reluctant to openly defy his parents. The girl arrives, alone and without a word of English, to a torrent of abusive neglect, from the moment that her husband fails to meet her at the airport to the hunger she endures trapped in an apartment with neither groceries nor the cultural abilities to go buy them

herself. She suffers a dangerous fever, unattended, while he is out frolicking with his girlfriend. Luckily, an older woman, a friend of her parents in Thailand, has taken it upon herself to secretly watch out for her. When the bride runs away in desperation, it is this woman who locates her. Together with the spurned wife of yet another man who is in love with the fickle, temptress girlfriend, they eventually form a tacit sisterhood. The three women then conspire to humiliate the male culprits publically at a dance party and to make the point that they are not to be trifled with in the future. As the film closes, they emerge victorious and vindicated.

With *Niam a kaj*, viewing video becomes a vehicle for direct gender critique by Hmong American women. Yet, the lure of the melodrama, the poignancy of tragedy, and the sensual pleasure of viewing nostalgic homeland scenes in films such as *Dr. Tom* cannot be ignored in this account of women's consumption. Women, too, remember the lost courtships of their youth and are subject to the visceral incitements of Nkauj Iab's beauty and to the titillations of unconfessed love.

As with the romance readers described by the cultural studies critic Janice Radway, women simultaneously consumed these texts both for "emotional gratification" and out of "dissatisfaction, longing and protest" (1984, 212, 214). Both the more feminist pleasures and the erotics of media viewing need to be situated together in complex and flickering subjectivities, with neither privileged as a dominant structure of feeling that would eclipse other sensibilities. As Purnima Mankekar, describing Indian women's television consumption, put it: "Viewers' semiotic skills were shaped by their positions along multiple axes of power. I posit that not only are texts polysemic, but subjectivities are multifarious as well. Since the position of the subject is an unstable, temporary one rather than a static sociological ascription, she is located in an interdiscursive space" (1999, 17).

Despite her victimized fate, the character of Nkauj Iab is not portrayed as entirely lacking in subjectivity, agency, or sexuality. Nkauj Iab, it turns out in one surprising scene, is not simply a sex object without her own desire, and she is far from being passively virginal. Indeed, she is barely a virgin by the time Tom marries her. In a scene just before she is wed to Dr. Tom, she seeks out her boyfriend alone in his room. They lament their tragic fate, but he, ever filial, assures her that it is the right thing to do for the good of her family. She is not satisfied with this virtuous resolve and proposes that they run away together. Then, in a remarkable assertion of female sexual agency, she rises to undress, beginning to remove her jacket while proclaiming that if they are to part she wants first to give him "that which is most precious to

her," a euphemism for her virginity. When her ever-sacrificing lover refuses her advance, protesting that it will only make them miss each other more in the future, she runs crying from the room, accusing him of not loving her. For the homeland beauty, then, a deficit of social power does not necessarily imply sexual passivity or asexuality.

Hmong women with whom I have discussed this scene find it implausible in the extreme. They are astounded that an unmarried woman should be pictured risking her social standing by initiating sex. And they are cynically amused that the boyfriend should not seize on this irresistible opportunity. But here we arrive at another feature of the film that might make it compellingly complex to women. The video offers not only the reprehensible Dr. Tom as a male protagonist. It also sketches an ideal lover in the figure of Tub Nus, who not surprisingly happens to be an orphan—a stock heroic character of traditional Hmong folklore, and a regular figure in other Hmong videos—who always occupies the spot of the sympathetic protagonist. Indeed, the back cover of the video case places close-ups, first of Tub Nus on the left, with Tom appearing in a shot of equivalent size, at his right. Tub Nus is sensitive and considerate; he cares passionately, but is so moral that he will never take advantage of Nkauj Iab, even if she offers herself. He has restraint, and is willing to sacrifice for family obligation. He is loyal and hardworking.

That there are two forms of masculinity, ambivalently presented in the narrative of *Dr. Tom*, speaks again to the video's multivalence. Although Tom gets it all, he also receives extreme social censure both within the text and in its metacommentary on sexual ethics. Meanwhile, the tender crafting of the boyfriend holds out for another version of manhood, one full of heart and upright in society. And lest this image of more appropriate manhood be irrevocably and exclusively associated with the homeland past, it should be noted that by the end of the first part, Tub Nus has migrated to America. Hmong women viewers have not expressed direct pleasure in watching Tub Nus as an attractive filmic object, but the presence of a rival form of masculinity, as presented in his character, opens up a hopeful domain for contestation over how Hmong men should conduct themselves under new transnational conditions and at differing locations in the globalizing Hmong social structure. For Hmong women in the West, *Dr. Tom* presents not only an admonition but also a vehicle for ongoing vigilance—through repeat viewing and through the social life of the film—about how Hmong men should and do behave.

Conclusions

In a certain sense, one of the things this chapter has strived for is an interruption of any unitary sense of the generic "refugee." Hmong American men and women have distinct structures of desire for home. While men have been in the position to quest for home through actually returning and pursuing homeland liaisons (although it is only the minority that actually do it), women have been positioned as purveying moral censure for such practices. Hmong women are also returnees to Asia—as kin, as travelers, and as businesspeople—but they have not been located in the dynamics of erotic interchanges in which men are always implicated regardless of whether or not they act upon them.[13] At the transnational scale, the gender binary has taken on a new valence as homeland becomes the quested-after feminine and sex becomes something that can be longed for from far away. Transnational erotics remix sex and space, refashioning the most intimate of interiorities. Physical distance and proximity come to be complexly articulated in the contours of homeland desire. As the anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli and the historian of sexuality George Chauncey, commenting on globalization and sexuality studies, have noted, this "reconfiguration of the intimate and the proximate poses a set of interesting problems to theories of sexuality" (1999, 443).

In such processes of reconfiguration, one in which spatiocultural difference always inflects moments of intimacy, one key agent is media. The imbrication of media with transnationalism and diasporic subjectivity means at least two things: first, in the consumption of media, people may develop social imaginaries and senses of community and identity that are supralocal—*even when they are not mobile themselves.* This is a process that has been abundantly described by anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai (1996), Lila Abu-Lughod (1995), Purnima Mankekar (1999), and Mayfair Yang (1997). Second, and conversely, media production and circulation can itself generate certain forms of transnational mobility and new types of transnational relations. In this case, I have ventured to suggest that, through the process of erotic subjectification, the incitements of homeland videos might foment desires for actual returns in pursuit of erotic encounters.

Media, then, are never only about meanings harbored within texts: media's webs of significance are immanent in myriad social effects, in relations of production and reception as well. The media studies scholar Hamid Naficy has written eloquently of what he calls "independent transnational film" produced by immigrants making texts of their exilic lives: "By linking genre,

authorship, and transnational positioning, the independent transnational genre allows films to be read and reread not only as individual texts produced by authorial vision and generic conventions, but also as sites for intertextual, cross-cultural, and translational struggles over meanings and identities" (1996, 121). Precisely because of the polysemous character of media, and the palimpsestical nature of diasporic productions, we must bring complex, ethnotextual readings to them. Methodologically this involves engagement with producers and audience members who occupy diverse subject positions and who receive the contents of media from divergent viewing perspectives. It means attending to the dialogues between audiences and producers as members of a community. It demands interpretive practices of intertextuality, a sensitivity to the way citations are made between texts, and to other cultural fragments such as folklore, as well as to the ways that texts speak to each other as part of the public culture of diasporic community. Finally it means imagining that such media as Hmong homeland videos might be plural in meanings, containing not only didacticism and pedagogy, but also incitement and eroticism, that they engage the senses as well as moral sensibilities, that they themselves effect seductions as well as enlightenments.

Notes

1. For classic ethnographic treatments of Hmong history, religion, culture, and economic development in Southeast Asia, see the work of Cooper (1984), Geddes (1976), G. Y. Lee (1981), Lemoine (1972), and Tapp (1989). An important recent addition is Tapp's (2003) study of Hmong in China.

2. For historical treatments from differing political standpoints on the Hmong as minorities in Laos and their relations to Lao, French colonists, and Americans, see the work of Adams and McCoy (1970), Dommen (1971), Gunn (1990), Hamilton-Merrit (1993), LeBar and Suddard (1960), G. Y. Lee (1982), M. M. Lee (2005), and Stuart-Fox (1986). For an analysis by a French-trained Hmong-Lao intellectual, see Yang Dao's (1993) study.

3. For other investigations of diasporic revisits, see the work of Louie (2004), on Han Chinese, and Tapp (2000b), on Hmong returnees, both to China.

4. Since this study was undertaken, media modalities have proliferated, and the DVD format has, for the most part, displaced VHS. New media formats are increasingly interfacing with the feature-length films with which the industry began. It is common, for instance, for younger filmmakers to create shorts and put them up on YouTube. As well, more filmmakers are experimenting with graphics and animation. There is also a burgeoning younger filmmakers' community that networks through Facebook groups and holds mini film festivals. Through these modalities, younger filmmakers circulate trailers, previews, and other promotional material, as well as announce casting calls,

location requests, and other technical topics. Within these communities, there has been much discussion of the threat to the Hmong film genre posed by the advent of digital modes that allow rampant proliferation and diminish sales in favor of piracy, such that producers are becoming concerned that there will be no sustainable economic future for Hmong movies.

5. The term "Miao" has a long history of various usages to denote non-Han peoples in China. In the Maoist era, the term was stabilized to refer officially to a large umbrella category, the fifth largest minority in China, within which researchers included several subgroups, including the people that call themselves "Hmong." For the purposes of this chapter, "Miao" appears when I refer to Hmong coethnics in China. Although readily adopted by many in China, the term remains highly contested outside the mainland. For more detailed discussion of the politics of ethnonyms, see Schein (2000b, xi–xiv, 35–67).

6. This research, which will culminate in a book, *Rewind to Home: Hmong Media and Gendered Diaspora*, effectively spans almost three decades, since I began working with Hmong refugees in Providence, R.I., in 1979. Primarily in the years since 1995, I have attended events and conducted interviews and participant observation during short-term visits to multiple U.S. cities, including Fresno, Calif.; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.; Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia; Wausau and Milwaukee, Wisc.; Providence, R.I.; and Detroit. I am especially grateful to the Rutgers Research Council for financial support of this research, as well as to the many Hmong in all these cities who have lent me their time. For more on the scope and politics of interchanges between Asia and U.S. Hmong/Miao, see Schein (1998, 2000a). For a theorization of homeland erotics, see Schein (1999b). An overview of Hmong diasporic media practices can be found in Schein (2002).

7. Since the initial writing of this chapter, access to video and DVD technologies has increased a great deal in the Asian sites of Hmong origin. It will require further research to discern audience reception on the part of those who are also represented in these videos.

8. All translations are a result of collaborations with Hmong native speakers. For translation assistance, I would especially like to thank Nouzong Ly, Ly Chong Thong Jalao, Doualy Thao, Yuepheng Xiong, KaYing Yang, Long Yang, Yang Teng, Ga Moua, and Doua Thor.

9. I purchased the video and each sequel as they came out, widely distributed through ethnic groceries and festivals, and by the director's mail order business. I have watched them dozens of times and in multiple contexts, with Hmong men and women of all ages, in Hmong communities in California, the Midwest, and Philadelphia, and in my own living room. I have also watched many parts with the director Ga Moua. In many instances, watching the videos together was also accompanied by extended group and individual discussions of key elements of the story and images.

10. These indications include increasingly widespread commentary on the part of Hmong Americans about this phenomenon, commentary that not only critiques but also normalizes the practice; my own qualitative observations in China and the United

States of the frequency of such interactions; and the growing mobilization and even outright rage of those in Southeast Asia who see these liaisons in increasingly structural terms. For more on the standpoint of Hmong in Southeast Asia, see the unblinking documentary *Death in Thailand* (2002), shot, directed, and edited by Hmong American men.

11. For more on abduction and other forms of marriage practice that have been controversial in the American legal system, see the work of Donnelly (1994, 113–44), Goldstein (1986), Koptiuch (1996), Scott (1988), and Tapp (1989, 189–90).

12. Jim Suhr, "Rape Charges Shake Hmong Refugees," Associated Press, October 14, 1999.

13. At the present revision in 2012, however, there are increasing stories of Hmong American women returning to Southeast Asia for romantic relationships.

Videography

China, Part 3. Su Thao. ST Universal Video, 1995. VHS.

Death in Thailand. Va-Megn Thoj. C.H.A.T. Television Productions, Frogtown Media Productions, 2002. VHS.

Niam a kaj [Bride unseen]. Su Thao. ST Universal Video, 1998. VHS.

Yuav tos txog hnub twg [How long until the day I am waiting for?]. Ga Moua. Ntsa Iab, 1995. VHS.

Yuav tos txog hnub twg [How long until the day I am waiting for?]: *Dr. Tom II*. Ga Moua. Ntsa Iab, 1997. VHS.

Yuav tos txog hnub twg [How long until the day I am waiting for?]: *Dr. Tom III*. Ga Moua. Ntsa Iab, 1999. VHS.

ANOTHER KIND OF LOVE?

Debating Homosexuality and Same-Sex Intimacy through Taiwanese and Chinese Film Reception

When the Taiwan–Hong Kong production *Shuang zhuo* (*The Twin Bracelets*) (1990) reached the United States, it was shown in two kinds of settings: gay and lesbian film festivals and Asian film series, particularly those focused on issues of gender and sexuality.[1] The only mainstream review of the film published in the United States appeared in the movie trade journal *Variety*, where the reviewer proclaimed *The Twin Bracelets* "the first lesbian film shot in mainland China."[2] The guide to the San Francisco International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, where the movie was first screened in 1992, introduced it as "a lesbian version of [Zhang Yimou's] *Raise the Red Lantern*" and described its setting as "a fishing village where people have no concept of human rights, women's liberation, lesbian love, or even divorce" (San Francisco 1992). Viewer response to *The Twin Bracelets* at the San Francisco festival was so positive that it was awarded best feature film by the audience.

When the film aired at the International Festival of Lesbian and Gay Films in 1992 in New York, however, one reviewer questioned how far this particular reading might travel. Acknowledging *The Twin Bracelets*' lesbian overtones, he nonetheless mused aloud that "it's worth wondering whether audiences in China would see its central relationship as sexual or ur-political" (Cheshire 1992, 20). Among the multiple voices clamoring to claim *The Twin Bracelets* as a reflection of a neophyte lesbian identity in China, Cheshire's review stands out for asking readers to consider "the cultural relativism of gender preferences" (although, interestingly enough, not sexual preferences)

(1992, 20).[3] His cautionary tone encourages us to step back and reconsider what messages different audiences might see in the film.

In this chapter I examine the reception of *The Twin Bracelets* in China, Taiwan, and the United States by asking how individuals and communities generate diverse understandings of eroticism, sexuality, and intimacy through the process of viewing and interpreting film.[4] *The Twin Bracelets* chronicles the coming-of-age experiences of two young women from a village in southeastern China who pledge their love and commitment to one another as "sister-husband and sister-wife" (*jiemei fuqi*), only to find their bond threatened by their families' decision to marry them to men they have never met. When I first watched *The Twin Bracelets* in 1993 in the United States, I was skeptical of its being marketed as a lesbian film. After several years of fieldwork in eastern Hui'an County, a coastal region of southeast China, where the story ostensibly takes place, I became more convinced that the film was being misread in the United States, in large part due to the tendency to subsume same-sex intimacy under sexual identity. I had little understanding, however, of how different Chinese audiences would interpret the relationship between the two female protagonists that drives the film's narrative.

Through showing the film to groups both in China and Taiwan, I came to see how viewers' responses were shaped as much by their emplacement in national and regional communities as by their reading of the two women's bond. Whereas reviewers in the United States were more inclined to interpret the protagonists' relationship through the lens of same-sex eroticism, audiences in eastern Hui'an questioned the authenticity of a sexual reading, given their own localized experiences of intimate same-sex ties. Taiwanese viewers, by contrast, responded to the film with an eye to the contentious relationship between Taiwan and mainland China and to the global reach of Western discourses of sexual subjectivity. By drawing attention to connections between emplacement and film reception, I show how film provides both a referent and a setting for debates that seek to situate intimacy, erotics, sexual subjectivity, and modernity in their proper time and place.

Cross-cultural sexuality studies have increasingly questioned a taken-for-granted relationship between sexual acts on the one hand and sexual identities on the other, in part by striving to understand indigenous subject positions in relation to local and global discourses and practices (Berry, Martin, and Yue 2003b; Blackwood 2008; Boellstorff 2003a, 2005, 2007; Chao 2000; Cruz and Manalansan 2002; Elliston 1995; Jackson 2001; Johnson, Jackson, and Herdt 2000; Leung 2008; Liu and Rofel 2010; Martin 2003;

Martin et al. 2008; Patel 2004; Rofel 2007b; Sinnott 2004; Weston 1993). This chapter builds on such scholarship, shifting its focus slightly to examine a broader range of same-sex intimacies (not all of them sexual) in order to assess how viewers from disparate backgrounds negotiate the relationship between practice and identity. Whereas many analyses of same-sex relations and sexuality in Chinese societies have focused on literature or medical discourses (Dikötter 1995; Hinsch 1990; Liu and Rofel 2010, part 1; Martin 2003, 2010; Sang 2003; Sieber 2001; Wu 2002), I turn to film as a powerful medium for bringing into relief tensions between affective intimacy and erotic desires. Moreover, I approach film not only as a text to be read (Berry 2001; Eng 2010; Leung 2008; Martin 2003, 2010; Silvio 2008) but also as an experience of viewing that produces responses both narrative and embodied. I suggest that visual images encourage viewers to engage in processes of identification and disavowal that inspire memories and even experiences of desire and intimacy. These, in turn, fuel ontological debates about sexual and national identities that are at once a step removed from the embodied experience of film viewing and intimately associated with it.

I am ultimately concerned with how erotic desires are interwoven with both sexual and nonsexual forms of identity and how those identities are produced through and in conjunction with film viewing. This approach requires what Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein describe in their introduction to this volume as a "transnational analytics." The production, distribution, and consumption of *The Twin Bracelets* transcend national boundaries, drawing attention to the global circuits in which films move and to the diverse political, social, and sexual frameworks through which they are made and received. *The Twin Bracelets* is part of a growing body of "Greater China" cinema: the product of collaboration between a Taiwanese director and a Hong Kong production company, shot on location in China with a Hong Kong and Taiwanese cast, and distributed to Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking audiences across Asia (except for China) and selectively in Europe and North America.[5] In other words, the film was made with a specifically nonnational viewership in mind and its circulation reflects the appeal of films produced on the margins of global media centers for both regional and transregional audiences.

Although in the United States *The Twin Bracelets* was seen predominantly as a lesbian film, its reception in Taiwan, in Hong Kong, and among the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia was more varied. The distribution company in Taiwan billed the film using the catchy but ambiguous phrase "another kind of love" (*ai de ling yi zhong*). The slogan's appeal rests on its unspoken

8.1. Promotional advertisement for *The Twin Bracelets* with the slogan "another kind of love."

referent, a "kind of love" from which the "other kind," portrayed in the film, ostensibly diverges. Without explicitly naming this love as sexual, the slogan evokes the widest range of possible meanings by pivoting on the single character "another" (*ling*), a term that encodes the possibility of multiple desires and intimacies. Heterosexuality is not fully erased by this phrase, but is constituted as the absent norm, constantly hovering in the background by virtue of its dominant relation to "other" intimate bonds (Elliston 1995, 862; Halley 1993).

The circulation of *The Twin Bracelets* within Greater China and between Asia and the West thus unsettles our ability to locate intimacy and desire socially, spatially, and temporally. It raises questions similar to those asked by Elizabeth Povinelli and George Chauncey in their reflections on the "transnational turn" in queer studies, such as "where are the intimate and proximate spaces in which persons become subjects of embodied practices and times of desire?" (1999, 443). Cinematic portrayals force viewers to struggle

with categories that easily spill into one another: affective love, erotic desire, friendship, and mutual obligation and support. At the same time, images of intimate acts also inspire debates over the proper context of film interpretation and the proper conditions for identifying intimate behaviors with specific subjective orientations. These contexts and conditions reflect geographical and cultural locations that both exist prior to the moment of film viewing and are produced through the cinematic experience itself. Why do some visual images of emotional intensity and physical closeness become intelligible to certain audiences through sexual ontologies? In attributing to *The Twin Bracelets*' protagonists a "lesbian" relationship, do film critics and audiences in the United States appeal to a sexual identity that precedes their viewing of the film, one that they read into the embraces and intimate secrets shared between the two women? How is this process different from the reactions of gay- and lesbian-identified (*tongzhi*) communities in Taiwan or the responses of viewing groups in China who associated the characters' relationship with same-sex bonds common in eastern Hui'an? These debates over the representation of female intimacy and sexuality in *The Twin Bracelets* take place in the context of ongoing struggles over the status of acts and identities that define gender and sexuality in terms at once global, local, and regional.

Methodological Note

The methods I used to study *The Twin Bracelets* emerged from my efforts to understand how audiences constituted themselves and others as gendered, sexual, ethnic, and national subjects through the process of film viewing (see also S. Friedman 2006b). This research emerged from a broader project on identity construction in China that examined, among other issues, how media portrayals struggled to resolve ambiguous ethnic statuses that did not fit clearly into state-sanctioned identity categories (S. Friedman 2006a). In the end I did not include *The Twin Bracelets* in that study because I felt I needed to hear the voices of viewers themselves in order to understand the complex productive power of media. Given that the film was released in 1990, I was not able to observe its life as a social text in its original context. To overcome this obstacle, I reintroduced *The Twin Bracelets* to diverse communities in the summer of 2002, in some cases showing it to groups who would not have had the opportunity to view it when it was first released. Many Taiwanese audience members had heard of the movie but only a few had actually seen it in 1990. Because *The Twin Bracelets* never aired in China, audiences there were encountering it for the first time, although Hui'an vil-

lagers were familiar with other films of a similar genre and some urban viewers had read the short story on which it is based.

In both locales, my viewing groups were determined by the kind of social ties that often structure informal audience communities, such as gender, kinship, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and classmate, workplace, and residential bonds. In China, I showed the film to five groups in the eastern Hui'an village of Shanlin (a pseudonym), where I have conducted research since the mid-1990s, and to one group in the nearby city of Xiamen, two members of which originally hailed from Hui'an. Within Shanlin, viewing groups of two to ten individuals were organized around kinship and neighborhood ties, as well as widespread same-sex relationships known in Minnan dialect as *dui pnua*, roughly translated as "companion" (S. Friedman 2009). Women represented the majority of group members and they ranged in age from their teens through their seventies, with most in the twenty-to-fifty age group.

Whereas I knew many of the Shanlin viewers personally, in Taiwan I worked through introductions from friends and colleagues to create audiences more reflective of the island's population. The seven groups who watched *The Twin Bracelets* with me included urban and rural residents; professionals, students, civil servants, and low-level office workers; women and men in their teens through middle-age and with educational levels from high school through graduate degrees; those who espoused traditional ideas about family and gender roles and those who identified as ardent feminists; and viewers who expressed a preference for same-sex sexual partners as well as those for whom heterosexuality remained the unquestioned norm. Audiences varied from gatherings of four or five individuals to as many as twenty at one public screening. Whereas viewing sessions in Shanlin and Xiamen took place in the more intimate spaces of family homes, Taiwanese viewers watched the film in settings ranging from office conference rooms and apartment living rooms to public sites, such as a bookstore and a village street.

One key difference between audiences in Hui'an and Taiwan lay in their efforts to establish the film's authenticity as a reflection of social reality. In Hui'an, viewers engaged in an ongoing discussion while watching the film in which they strove to locate the story in its "real" time and place. Through discussing the authenticity of the female characters' attire and headscarves, and through debating where particular scenes were filmed (almost all were filmed in Hui'an, although in different locations), viewers endeavored to determine precisely when in the past the story took place and whether it accu-

rately reflected their own experiences of local marriage customs and close same-sex bonds. Viewers in Shanlin read authenticity through the bodies and actions of the female characters. Did they dress and adorn themselves as local women did? Were some characters' behaviors more authentic than others? How closely did the film's portrayal of marriage customs hew to community norms and expectations? By working to establish the provenance of *The Twin Bracelets* (locally accurate as opposed to outsider's representation), viewing groups simultaneously produced "local culture" and established the proper context for their cinematic interpretation. By defining a sense of place through film spectatorship, in other words, viewers constituted "the local" as an active, dynamic process rather than a fixed, static entity. This act of generating local culture subsequently informed how audiences interpreted the film. If *The Twin Bracelets* was deemed relatively true to "local" life, then the relationship between the two female protagonists could easily be assimilated into the category of dui pnua and any sexual readings disavowed.

Unlike audiences at screenings in Shanlin, Taiwanese viewers generally remained quiet while watching the movie and engaged in discussion only after it had ended, with some groups initiating lively debates and others looking to me for specific questions. In most of the viewings, discussion sessions typically began with audience members asking me about the veracity of the marriage practices and dress styles depicted in the film, and their questions invariably led them to compare these customs with the arranged marriages and gender inequalities characteristic of much of Taiwanese and Chinese history. Locating such similarities safely in the past enabled viewers to reaffirm the modernity and progressiveness of contemporary Taiwanese society; in so doing, it also allowed some respondents to disavow any sense that the film was about them. As a schoolteacher in her late thirties who viewed the film at a public screening at a feminist organization argued, "If it was my grandparents or parents, [members of] that generation who were watching the film, perhaps they would feel that it was quite normal because their marriages were pretty much this way. It's because today we have a lot of 'information' that we respond 'Wow! How could it be like this?'" This kind of disavowal did not deny a history of close ties between Taiwan and China (and, in fact, many Taiwanese viewers noted that the absence of politics in the film made the scenes feel more familiar), but it did claim Taiwan as a more progressive society with regard to marriage practices and gender roles, implicitly reversing an internationally recognized hierarchy that privileged China over Taiwan as the dominant global power (see also Shih 1995).[6]

By integrating published reviews from *The Twin Bracelets*' original release with responses from viewing groups and my own cinematic reading, I have sought to balance semiotic analyses based on written and visual texts with ethnographic insights derived from my participation in film screenings and broader discussions about cinematic representation and same-sex intimacy. In the end, however, my analysis draws most heavily on viewers' spoken responses to the film, placing them in dialogue with one another.[7] This method resonates with what Louisa Schein (2004, 436) terms an "ethnotextual" approach, one closely attuned to my own cinematic reading practices and those of the people I work with, as well as to the intertextual contexts that situate both *The Twin Bracelets* and audience responses in a wider field of cultural production. I acknowledge that analyzing the desires and intimacies produced through cinematic representation is a difficult endeavor, particularly because eroticism itself emerges most powerfully from viewers' experience of watching a film and from their responses to that experience (which may or may not be accessible to the ethnographer). Taking seriously the inchoate nature of reading and reception practices requires acknowledging both the limits to one's interpretive abilities and the effects that film has on one's own subjective orientation (see also the introduction to this volume). Therefore, throughout this chapter I place my own reading and location in dialogue with those of other viewers, neither privileging my interpretations with anthropological authority nor theirs with native authenticity. It is my hope that this approach offers some insights into what viewers experienced as they watched images of same-sex intimacy on the screen and how they related those images to sexual and national identities embedded in both local and global contexts.

From Text to Celluloid

Shuang zhuo originated as a short story of the same title, written by the Chinese author Lu Zhaohuan and published in the Chinese literary journal *Fujian wenxue* in 1986 (Lu 1986b). Based in the 1980s, it tells the story of Huihua and Xiugu, two young women from eastern Hui'an County whose close relationship is suddenly put to the test as they reach maturity and are forced by their families to submit to arranged marriages. Xiugu is married to a poor but gentle stone-carver who eventually wins her heart, whereas the younger Huihua finds herself paired with a wealthy womanizer who treats her with violence rather than care. As Xiugu grows more attached to her husband, Huihua becomes increasingly desperate to preserve their bond as "sister-husband and sister-wife." When Xiugu becomes pregnant and leaves

the village to join her husband, however, Huihua, finding no other means of escape from her abusive marriage, decides to take her own life.

In a postscript to his short story, Lu Zhaohuan proclaims that as a native of Hui'an County, he had always been disturbed by what he described as the oppressive marriage customs and repressed desires of local women. Bemoaning the predominance of child betrothals and long customary periods of postmarital separation between spouses, Lu briefly outlined what he saw as a twisted form of female morality in which sexual repression and self-denial constituted the epitome of chastity and integrity.[8] "I have a responsibility to describe [women's] misfortune and suffering," Lu wrote, "[and] I seek to illuminate the imprisoned world of the female psyche" (Lu 1986a, 18). In an interview I conducted with him in 2002, Lu elaborated on the teleology underlying his model of women's liberation, pointing to feudal influences, long-standing gender inequalities, and a powerful dialectic of heterosexual desire and fear as forces that needed to be overturned in order to put an end to women's oppression. Lu's commentary on his literary inspirations reflects what we might call, following Foucault (1978), a tendency to locate the truth of women's being in their sexuality, thereby linking the freeing of women's heterosexual desires to the modernizing urges of male Chinese elites.

As the short story was republished in literary journals in Taiwan and Hong Kong, however, critics and editors focused on what they saw as the compelling homosexual relationship between the story's two female protagonists. In an introduction to a collection of mainland Chinese stories in the prestigious Taiwanese literary monthly *Lianhe wenxue*, the editors claimed that "Lu Zhaohuan's '*Shuang Zhuo*' [Twin bracelets] . . . is the only Mainland work of fiction of the last thirty plus years to take female homosexuality as its subject matter" (Editorial Office 1987, 89).[9] Lu later responded to such characterizations of his work by asserting that there was no part of the story in which there was "homosexuality in the true sense [of the term]" (Lu 1992, 243). He effectively rejected interpretations of a lesbian subplot by defining homosexuality as a form of sexual inversion that arises only when an individual wearies of heterosexuality. The absence of "normal" heterosexual relations in Hui'an marriages, in Lu's view, made a homosexual reading of the story virtually impossible, because for him there was no independent same-sex eroticism, only that which resulted from frustrated heterosexual desire.

Similar conflicts over same-sex eroticism erupted when *The Twin Bracelets* was released as a film in 1990. The project was conceived by one of Taiwan's few female directors, Huang Yushan, who attributed her motiva-

tions for making the film to a profound sympathy with the plight of Hui'an women. In an article in a Taiwanese women's magazine, Huang recalled how she was so moved by Lu Zhaohuan's short story that she made a special trip to China to meet the author and secure film rights to the story. She felt an intense desire to capture Hui'an women's suffering on film, so as to promote awareness of the gender oppression they faced. These inequalities were all the more shocking for her, given global demands for women's equal rights and sexual liberation in the 1980s. Because Hui'an women "still can not lead normal marital lives," Huang (1990, 135) concluded, they have no choice but to turn to the emotional intricacies of same-sex "sisterhood," and ultimately suicide, as their only means of escape.

In accounts in the Taiwan press published shortly after *The Twin Bracelets* was released, Huang made it clear that she was not explicitly concerned with questions of female sexuality, except insofar as women's sexual desires had been repressed by abnormal marital relations and oppressive societal norms. At a roundtable discussion that coincided with the film's initial screening in southern Taiwan, Huang argued that while "we" in Taiwan might "consider" Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship to be homosexual, her point in making the film was not to explore their sexuality but to show how they had been oppressed by a closed society that imposed high costs on women's acts of resistance: "The same-sex love between the two young women in the film is produced by the behavioral patterns [that result] from escaping the traditional Confucian code. Their oath to become sister-husband and sister-wife develops from observing their elders kneel and worship during the wedding ceremony. Because they do not have a high level of education, they don't even know what homosexuality is" (D. Sun 1990; see also H. Chen 1990).

Here Huang emphasizes the inability of Hui'an women to comprehend homosexuality, due to their low levels of education. Just as the protagonists mirror their same-sex bond on heterosexual marriage, so, Huang assumes, they must be taught how to perform nonheterosexual erotic acts and identities—a point that was raised in some of my Taiwanese viewing groups, as well. Other reviews published in the aftermath of the film's release also underscored its message of traditional Confucian gender inequalities and downplayed signs of homosexual awakening. A review in the mainstream Taiwan newspaper *Lianhe bao* drew attention to the tragedy of female suffering that suffused the plot by characterizing the film as a "lament over the abuse of women." Asserting that "there is no need to rigidly distinguish whether Huihua is a lesbian or a feminist," the reviewer concluded that the value of *The Twin Bracelets* lay in its complex portrayal of patriarchal op-

pression that enabled Taiwanese viewers to identify with the film's mainland Chinese setting.[10]

When I met with Huang Yushan in 2002 to discuss the film, she was more willing to reflect on the sexual nuances in *The Twin Bracelets* and its impact on her own work and that of other directors. Although originally she had not intended to make a film about female sexuality, during the editing process she began to question how the relationship between Huihua and Xiugu would appear to audiences. The Hong Kong production company Cosmopolitan took a firm stance on the issue, however, arguing that the film had to be clear that the young women were not lesbians, otherwise ambiguity would undermine its cinematic effect. At the time, Huang felt that although the characters supported one another emotionally, they did not have a sexual bond.

Yet as soon as *The Twin Bracelets* was released in Taiwan, Huang found that friends and students began to confide in her their own "homosexual stories." "I was increasingly shocked," she confessed, particularly as people openly questioned her own heterosexuality by associating her with the characters in the film. Huang also noted that the Taiwanese distributor's decision to market the film under the slogan "another kind of love" intensified its ambiguity and potentially encouraged audiences to see it as a tale of lesbian love. This sense of ambiguity persisted among the Taiwanese who watched the film with me in 2002. One young woman who viewed it at the office of a feminist organization admitted that she was confused about whether the director intended to portray a homosexual relationship between Huihua and Xiugu. In the end, she concluded that the director merely sought to emphasize the inequalities in traditional heterosexual marriage, a conclusion that paralleled Huang's own association of *The Twin Bracelets* with a series of films produced in the 1990s that focused on women's suffering under Chinese patriarchy.[11]

Cinematic and Everyday Forms of Same-Sex Intimacy

As the bond between Huihua and Xiugu intensifies over the first few scenes of *The Twin Bracelets*, they swear an oath before a statue of the goddess Mazu: "We pledge marriage as sister-husband and sister-wife / To live together and die together / You are within me, I am within you / We will never part / You will not fail me, I will not fail you." They repeat this oath two more times during the movie, once when Xiugu reaffirms their bond just prior to her wedding and again at the very end of the film, when a distraught Huihua prepares to murder Xiugu and then take her own life so that they may at

least fulfill their pledge to die together. The oath weaves same-sex commitments into a web of intimacy that mirrors relationships based on patrilineal kinship and heterosexual marriage. It joins Huihua and Xiugu as one body, each literally internal to the other, and yet its fulfillment remains just beyond their reach. By becoming pregnant soon after her marriage, Xiugu prevents Huihua from consummating their relationship through a shared death (for Huihua is unwilling to murder Xiugu's unborn child). As the oath frames same-sex bonds in the language of marriage through the awkward phrase, "sister-husband and sister-wife," it injects a tension between intimacy and sexuality into the very heart of the narrative.

Viewing groups in Shanlin easily identified Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship with the local category of dui pnua bonds. Dui pnua are non-kin, same-sex, same-age cohort ties formed among both young men and women in eastern Hui'an villages. In their youth and young adulthood, dui pnua engage in a number of shared activities, from working and eating together to sleeping together at night, sharing clothing, or confiding intimate thoughts and concerns. They also perform important ritual functions at weddings, funerals, and birth celebrations. For young women in the past, dui pnua provided a source of comfort and support when faced with arranged marriages and the difficulties of living among strange in-laws. During the period of postmarital separation, when young wives remained in their natal communities, the familiarity and solace of dui pnua ties often gave women the strength to refuse requests for conjugal visits in order to delay becoming pregnant and moving to their husband's home. Female dui pnua networks cross-cut patrilineal kinship ties forged through birth or marriage, extending beyond village borders to link women in an extended web of homosocial bonds (S. Friedman 2006a, 2009).

Viewing groups in Shanlin responded excitedly to the scenes in *The Twin Bracelets* that portray a developing intensity in the relationship between Huihua and Xiugu: when the two bathe together and renew their vow never to forget each other, embracing naked in the tub; when Huihua intentionally injures herself in a final effort to prevent Xiugu from visiting her husband at the mid-autumn festival; or shortly after when Huihua hobbles in the dark to Xiugu's husband's home, only to interrupt sounds of passionate lovemaking that fade into silence when Huihua calls out for Xiugu. All of these scenes provoked a running commentary among viewers in which they compared Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship to those of dui pnua in the past. The scenes made the film authentic to audiences in Shanlin, by creating af-

finities between the characters' actions on the screen and viewers' own experiences of intense affective ties between women.

Such scenes prompted outcries of "that's really how it was" or "yes, in the past people really were like that" among a group of viewers in Shanlin, including Lei'a, her sister, several of Lei'a's dui pnua, and her older female relative, as we watched the film in the recently remodeled living room of Lei'a's new conjugal home.[12] Thirty-one-year-old Lei'a had remarried only a year earlier, following a divorce, and was already the mother of a three-month-old son. We nibbled on fresh fruit as *The Twin Bracelets* played on the brand new video compact disc (VCD) player and television set that Lei'a had brought as part of her dowry. Watching the scene in which Huihua and Xiugu embrace while standing in the tub—their naked, entwined bodies obscured by the steam rising from the bathwater—these married women in their twenties, thirties, and forties offered a chorus of comments on how girls slept three or four to a bed in the past and were very close. As Lei'a balanced film viewing with answering the telephone and infant feedings, she proclaimed with assurance: "It was really like that in those days. In the past [girls] slept together in the same bed. There weren't enough places to sleep. So everyone slept in the same bed. Their feelings for one another ran deep." So deep, one of Lei'a's dui pnua added, that "whoever among them liked going [to visit her husband] would be cursed by the others."

As Huihua struggles desperately to deflect Xiugu's growing feelings for her husband and reaffirm their own bond, she engages in behavior that was immediately comprehensible to Shanlin viewers familiar with the tensions between dui pnua intimacy and conjugal obligations. At another viewing that included members of an extended family and neighborhood women, thirty-two-year-old Leiden reacted strongly to the scene in which Huihua seeks to prevent Xiugu from setting out on the expected visit to her husband at the mid-autumn festival. As another young wife berates Xiugu for making her wait for hours at their appointed meeting place, Huihua lies in the other room, groaning in exaggerated pain from the injury she has inflicted on herself in an effort to forestall Xiugu's departure. "People in the past were like that," Leiden commented as the scene progressed. "Women who married into the same village called for one another [when they had to make conjugal visits]. A dui pnua would help her run away, didn't want to let her go, [would say] 'don't go!' But if the dui pnua was kind, she would advise her to go. Otherwise she would say that she didn't have to go, that there was no reason to go."

The women at Lei'a's viewing responded to these scenes with tales of specific couples in which one woman had refused marriage in order to remain with her fellow dui pnua. As it becomes clear that Huihua has failed to prevent Xiugu from leaving to visit her husband, the voice of Lei'a's older relative rang out across the room: "She [Xiugu] wants to go and the other one won't let her. It was really like that." A Hong, Lei'a's classmate from Chongwu, the nearby township seat, followed with her own bit of local specificity: "In Chongwu we have a couple like this. If [one woman's] husband comes home, the other woman won't let her sleep with him." After the film ended, A Hong described the two women for us in greater detail. Although they had been quite close in their youth, both had acquiesced to arranged marriages. One woman did not get along with her husband, however, and in the end she divorced him and went to live with her dui pnua, whose husband was rarely at home, since he worked in the provincial capital. Whenever he returned to Chongwu, however, this woman tried to prevent him from having sex with his wife. She would call out for the wife in the middle of the night (not unlike Huihua in the film) or send the couple's adopted daughter to sleep with them. A Hong's colorful description of these two women's shared life together reminded Lei'a of the "aunt" of another young woman they knew in the village. This so-called aunt had been the dui pnua of their friend's mother, and when the mother married into Shanlin, the aunt simply came with her.[13]

These tales of women "in the past" or older women in the present who placed dui pnua ties above conjugal ones, in some cases refusing to marry altogether, emerged in response to Huihua's cinematic efforts to reclaim Xiugu from her matrimonial obligations. Generated in the excitement of watching scenes that resembled, if not always accurately, their own sense of community history, Shanlin viewers reaffirmed the existence of a powerful web of same-sex intimacy that interlaced emotional intensity with physical closeness (as seen in the common refrain, girls used to sleep three or four to a bed). In telling these stories, however, viewers notably distanced themselves from forms of same-sex intimacy that they depicted as things of the past. When discussing other matters of cultural authenticity in the film—such as clothing styles, marriage practices, or customary expectations—they were more likely to relate cinematic events to their own experiences of weddings, relationships with new husbands, and labor requests from conjugal kin. Although all viewers were themselves participants in dui pnua circles, they nonetheless failed (or refused) to see themselves in the bond between Huihua and Xiugu or in Huihua's attempts to shore up that relationship

when faced with the threat of marriage. Their responses underscored the exceptionalism of women who pursued ties with other women over or against heterosexual marriage; although strong affective bonds were recognized and condoned in the community, they generally were not acknowledged by Shanlin audiences as a socially accepted alternative to marriage (a point I return to in the last section). Instead, viewers either located similar examples of same-sex intimacy safely in the past or attributed them to older women in their communities who had managed to preserve dui pnua ties by incorporating them into existing marital imperatives.

Is Same-Sex Intimacy Simply a Youthful Phase?

Responses from Taiwan audiences after watching *The Twin Bracelets* differed significantly from those of Shanlin viewers. In seeking common ground with the unfamiliar experiences of Huihua and Xiugu, male and female viewers from a range of class and ethnic backgrounds identified them with same-sex bonds forged during their school years or while serving in the military. Middle-aged men recalled friendships from their youth or military service, when pairs or groups spent all of their time together, even bathing together or sleeping in the same bed. Among women in their thirties and forties, watching Huihua's and Xiugu's burgeoning relationship brought back memories of schoolgirl intimacies modeled on marriage or other heterosexual ties. Many had attended all-girls schools where couples publicly pledged their commitment to one another or where one especially popular (and often more masculine looking) classmate might have several "wives" (*lao po*). When one member of the relationship strayed in her affections or attention, the other, beset with jealousy, would "break up" with her.[14]

Xiao Ling was the organizer of an all-female tongzhi group that had gathered to watch *The Twin Bracelets* at the upscale apartment of a Taipei television producer.[15] I had been introduced to Xiao Ling through a mutual friend, and when I proposed a film screening to her, she invited me to take advantage of an upcoming meeting where the group would be organizing a fundraiser to support their participation in the Gay Games in Australia. The nine women present, all in their twenties and thirties, had come of age during a period when same-sex sexuality was becoming a source of self-identification and political activism in Taiwan. The first lesbian organization, Women zhi Jian (Between Us), was formed in 1990, when the oldest members of the group were recent college graduates. Since then, a number of different organizations representing women who varied in age, class, and linguistic and ethnic background had come into being, some oriented toward

political activism and others focused on community-building and support. In the more open social and political environment of post-martial law Taiwan, gay and lesbian media and consumer culture gradually expanded, as well; and over the course of the 1990s and into the new millennium, both female and male same-sex sexuality and identity became recognizable and often sensationalized topics of public discourse on television and in print media. These changes have not meant that openly declaring one's sexual identity or preferences is without consequence, however, and both gays and lesbians continue to face social pressures to marry and the very real threat of discrimination if they acknowledge their same-sex desires and relationships (Chao 1996; Fishel 1994; Hu 2011; Martin 2003; Sang 2003, ch. 9; Zhuang 2002).[16]

As the group lounged on cushions and low stools in the austere, modern apartment high above the bustling street below, Xiao Ling regaled us with the tale of a childhood relationship that she argued was founded on principles of oath-swearing and mutual commitment similar to those shared by Huihua and Xiugu. She and A Cao had been primary school classmates. They had knelt down on the ground, plucked three blades of grass, and sworn an oath to remain together for their entire lives. According to Xiao Ling, however, A Cao had not taken the oath seriously; instead, she had begun to like other girls (as Xiao Ling later added, A Cao had seven "wives" from their class alone). Although Xiao Ling claimed that she had not been in love with A Cao, she simply could not bear A Cao's cavalier attitude toward their relationship.

As other group members began to analyze Xiao Ling's bond with A Cao, they agreed that it was not the result of love (*aiqing*) but perhaps of Xiao Ling's deeply felt need for a person she could depend on in her life. Like Huihua, moreover, she had seized on a particular individual to fulfill that role for her. Xiao Ling added that although she and A Cao had repeatedly sworn oaths to one another, in the end she had made the difficult decision to break off their relationship. All of these events took place before Xiao Ling completed her secondary schooling. After high school and throughout college Xiao Ling did not speak with A Cao, and it was only many years later that she contacted her again. Xiao Ling described their current relationship as one of mutual support and dependency in times of need: she had taken care of A Cao for six months when A Cao fell seriously ill, and the two had spoken about becoming companions and caring for one another in their old age. When I asked Xiao Ling how that kind of companionship would compare

with Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship, she replied, "It's very similar. I see it as a kind of luck or fate [*yunqi*]." When a younger member of the group added, "It's like dui pnua," Xiao Ling agreed.

These same-sex intimacies—whether dui pnua, schoolgirl, or military bonds—speak to a long history of homosociality in Chinese societies premised on gender-specific social and spatial worlds. That such ties were at various points in history and in disparate contexts sanctioned or, at a minimum, simply tolerated, reflects their relatively normative status. Perhaps the most frequently mentioned example of female intimacy is the sisterhoods that developed among women in the Pearl River Delta region of southern Guangdong, a region historically known for customs of delayed postmarital cohabitation similar to those practiced in eastern Hui'an (Sankar 1978; Siu 1990; Stockard 1989; Topley 1975). Unlike dui pnua groups, these sisterhoods had physical spaces of their own, girls' houses where young women slept and socialized after reaching puberty. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, some delta women went so far as to take vows of spinsterhood (*zishu*) by which they declared themselves adults outside of marriage. Although it is certainly possible that women in these relationships developed and acted on same-sex erotic desires (Sankar 1985), it was the sisterhood's role as a deterrent to marriage that made it potentially threatening to elite observers and government reformers (FSGGCK 1930; Sankar 1978; see the S. Friedman [2006a] study on eastern Hui'an).

The Twin Bracelets enacted this long-standing conflict between same-sex intimacies and conjugal obligations in ways that resonated with Shanlin women enmeshed in similar affective networks, many of whom had also experienced the emotional hardships of arranged marriages. By contrast, most Taiwanese viewers identified Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship with same-sex bonds that they subsequently grew out of once they developed a "proper" orientation to the opposite sex. And yet for some audiences, such as the women who watched the film with Xiao Ling, the film's portrayal of women's intimate ties inspired them to wrestle with the differences between close affective bonds and erotic desires for other women. Xiao Ling was quite explicit that she and A Cao had never developed a sexual relationship when they were young, even though both now identified as "lesbians" (she used the English term). For her (and, she claimed, for A Cao as well), their bond was more lasting and ultimately more dependable than their sexual relationships with other women.[17] What, then, made a sexual reading of the film possible for some viewers but not for others?

The scenes discussed by Shanlin and Taiwanese viewers as they compared Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship to more familiar forms of homosocial intimacy were also the scenes most frequently captured in still shots on marketing materials. These images of the two protagonists swearing their lifelong commitment to one another, embracing in the tub, lying face-to-face in bed, or posing for a male tourist, Huihua's arm draped over Xiugu's shoulder, have been reproduced in film reviews, advertisements, and on video tape and VCD covers. For reviewers in the United States, these shots confirmed that *The Twin Bracelets* was, as Fred Lombardi of *Variety* asserted, a "lesbian film" (1992, 59). Reviewers in the United States also emphasized the oppressive nature of local marriage customs in order to shore up assertions of the two women's budding lesbian relationship. Lombardi argues that the film portrays "a situation in which lesbians are made and not born," the deciding force being the "cruel patriarchal traditions" that transform the young women's "usual bonding" into a "ritualized sanctuary against marital oppression" (1992, 59). The San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Guide similarly describes "the daily oppression of the ancient [marriage] traditions" as motivating Huihua to "[seek] love and escape in the arms of her childhood buddy" (San Francisco 1992). In this struggle against an oppressive marriage system, American reviewers find the powerful roots of a lesbian relationship.

To evaluate this assertion of emergent lesbianism, however, we must return to the question with which I began this chapter. How do we know that what audiences see in Huihua's and Xiugu's oaths, expressions of affection, embraces, and even playful frolicking is in fact lesbianism, as opposed to dui pnua or other forms of same-sex intimacy? Why do some viewers interpret these behaviors as explicitly sexual, whereas others do not? The act of naming in response to films that circulate transnationally is by no means innocent, for as Martin Manalansan reminds us, global gay and lesbian politics are all too often predicated on a politics of visibility that recognizes the Western sexual subject as modern and liberated, a status to which the non-Western subject can only aspire. "*Gay* gains meaning according to a developmental narrative that begins with an unliberated, 'prepolitical' homosexual practice," Manalansan argues, "and that culminates in a liberated, 'out,' politicized, 'modern,' 'gay' subjectivity" (1997, 487; for an example, see Altman's [1997] study).[18] When viewers in China and Taiwan responded to scenes in *The Twin Bracelets* that suggested heightened physical intimacy

between Huihua and Xiugu, they often experimented with a language of sexual subjectivity that reflected the power and reach of this global gay-visibility discourse. As certain viewers debated the validity of a presumed correspondence between behavior and identity, they also evaluated the relevance of "homosexuality" to their own communities and intimate bonds.

Because *The Twin Bracelets* was never released in China, audiences in eastern Hui'an had no previous exposure to the debates about women's oppression and sexuality that the film had inspired in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Of the five groups that viewed the film with me, only in three was there any mention of homosexuality, and in each instance it was quite abbreviated. All references were to the term *dongsingluan*, a Minnan dialect rendering of the Mandarin *tongxinglian*, literally "same-sex (or same-nature) love," but most often translated as "homosexuality." Unlike tongzhi—the popular term encompassing gay, lesbian, and sometimes queer identity—tongxinglian is rarely a term of self-identification or empowerment; instead, like its English referent, it has a history of connoting the inferior antithesis of heterosexuality (*yixinglian*), together with medical and behavioral pathologization.[19]

The expression "sister-husband and sister-wife," invoked by Huihua and Xiugu in their oath to one another, sparked confusion and questioning among Shanlin viewers. When Lei'a first heard the term, she queried, "What is this 'sister-husband and sister-wife'? What does it mean? I don't understand!" As she watched Huihua and Xiugu bathe together and embrace in the tub, however, Lei'a began to question whether theirs was in fact a homosexual relationship. At the time, she concluded that it was not homosexuality (dongsingluan), but a relationship based on a form of mutual affection that was not limited to sexual or conjugal bonds (*en ai* in Mandarin). Several scenes later, on the night before Xiugu's wedding, Huihua and Xiugu lie down in bed fully clothed, with their arms wrapped around one another. Observing the women stretched out, facing one another, Lei'a's older female relative picked up this narrative thread, commenting: "Oh, she's like that. I don't understand. Homosexuality, so that's homosexuality." The older woman's confused commentary prompted Lei'a to revise her previous assessment: "It's true, filming it this way it's more realistic." One of Lei'a's dui pnua then echoed Lei'a's conclusion: "Homosexuality, by filming it like this it seems that way."

In these comments, homosexuality emerges as something that is not intrinsic to the women's relationship, but is a product of the way certain scenes are filmed. A shot of two women sleeping in the same bed was not strange for viewers accustomed to shared sleeping arrangements. What sparked

notice was *how* they were sleeping—face to face with their arms around one another—their positions serving as a culturally specific signifier of sexuality for Shanlin women. In a similar vein, the lead up to the one heterosexual sex scene in the movie titillated viewers in several groups because it showed Xiugu and her husband lying with their heads at the same end of the bed, a sure sign of impending sexual intercourse, viewers contended, when compared with typical head-to-foot sleeping arrangements in those days. Initially, I was nervous about showing this scene to Shanlin audiences because of its relative sexual explicitness (which was quite mild, in fact, when compared to Hollywood or Hong Kong movies). Some of my own discomfort was relieved when viewers laughed at Xiugu's new husband's faked snores and clumsy attempts to touch his wife. In response to his awkward gestures, members of the group at Lei'a's house drew different conclusions about how the scene would progress. A Hong predicted that "something would happen" between Xiugu and her husband that night, while another viewer declared that Xiugu would become angry and leave to sleep elsewhere. As the scene develops with growing sexual intensity, the group marked each step with comments such as "they're nervous" or "terrified," clearly drawing on their own marital experiences even as they underscored differences between the film's portrayal of the couple's sexual desire and their understanding of new wives in the past who typically refused to have sex with their husbands.

Watching Xiugu in bed with her new husband inspired knowing laughter and perhaps even pleasure among the viewers at Lei'a's house, the majority of whom were at most only a few years removed from their first marital sexual experiences. By contrast, reflections on scenes that suggested "homosexuality" were not characterized by a sense of implicit familiarity or even nervous humor. Instead, these depictions of physical intimacy forced viewers to struggle with the proper semantic domain of the term "dongsingluan" itself (for example, Lei'a's older relative did not "understand" the scene with Huihua and Xiugu in bed, nor did Lei'a comprehend the expression "sister-husband and sister-wife"). At the same time, however, they briefly entertained the possibility that homosexuality accurately named these portrayals of the two women's growing intimacy.

In another viewing session at a teacher's dorm in a local middle school not far from Shanlin, twenty-six-year-old A Ping explained the expression "sister-husband and sister-wife" by referring to recent changes in local discourse. "Only now do people use this term 'homosexuality,'" A Ping argued, lowering her voice to a whisper as she uttered "dongsingluan."[20] "People in the past didn't understand what that was, they couldn't absorb it [*tia*

bbue kui]. [They would have thought that] Huihua didn't want to let Xiugu marry." In other words, A Ping suggested that although the term was relatively new in local parlance, the behaviors it described were comprehensible to older residents steeped in a long history of conflicts between same-sex intimacy and heterosexual marriage.

There is a gap in A Ping's explanation, however, created by the erasure of erotic desires and sexual acts. A Ping implicitly (although perhaps not intentionally) acknowledged that gap as she went on to tell me and the other friend watching the film about an aunt of hers who had abandoned her husband and two children to live with a woman in the township seat. A Ping struggled to find words to describe her aunt's new relationship, moving from an initial, rather awkward, depiction of her as "being homosexual" with the woman to using a metaphor from the spirit world that characterized their relationship as fated and pure, rather than sexually consummated and thus polluting in the manner of a conjugal bond. A Ping's attempt to turn homosexuality into a verb through the construction "being homosexual" underscored her concern with specific acts as opposed to identity, for it was her aunt's decision to leave her husband and children for a woman that forced A Ping to wrestle with whether her aunt's motivations were sexual or emotional (yet strikingly not both).[21] Although A Ping's use of an other-worldly metaphor appeared to favor a non-sexual basis for the women's relationship, her ultimate abandonment of the story left open the question of the two women's sexual intimacy and whether homosexuality properly named their bond.

These examples suggest that for some Shanlin viewers, the film occasionally portrayed behaviors that they considered to be potentially homosexual. By viewing *The Twin Bracelets* as a somewhat accurate reflection of past life in their community, however, they ultimately concluded that such performances took place in a referential domain (authentic "local culture") that made a homosexual reading meaningless or, at minimum, confusing. In some cases, as when Lei'a's group emphasized the visual impact of the way scenes were filmed, homosexuality was attributed simply to cinematic effect, something that several Taiwanese viewers noted as well. At other moments, homosexuality was clearly defined as a concept introduced from outside (although from where precisely was not made clear), one that viewers such as A Ping suggested was incomprehensible to older villagers and that she herself struggled to understand in relation to marital and parental obligations and historical patterns of same-sex intimacy. As Lisa Rofel (2007b) notes, even the growing community of urban Chinese gays and lesbians wrestle with ar-

ticulating a mode of being gay that affirms "Chinese culture" (itself a subject of debate) and a social self defined through family, all without denying their sexual orientation or the way it links them to people with same-sex erotic desires in other parts of the world.[22] *The Twin Bracelets* similarly prompted Shanlin viewers to grapple with different frames for reading same-sex intimacy, while the film's apparent "realness" established the grounds on which they denied the accuracy of readings premised on sexual identity or same-sex eroticism.

Debating Erotic Acts and Sexual Subjectivity

Among audiences in Taiwan, the association of homosexuality with sexual desires and behaviors inspired viewers to debate whether the female protagonists were, in fact, homosexual. As a senior journalist for a prominent Taipei media company argued at a lunchtime screening for journalists and editors, homosexuality required attention to the issue of sexual love. "I think that homosexuality should suggest a kind of self-awareness or consciousness," she contended, adding that, in her view, this included not only self-understanding but also sexual needs (*xing de xuqiu*). For members of the female tongzhi group organized by Xiao Ling, sexual desires and acts were critical to evaluating the status of Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship. The group argued back and forth over whether Huihua's and Xiugu's interactions in bed were "intimate movements" (*qinmi de dongzuo*), ultimately concluding that neither woman "knew how to do it." But were sexual desires something that one had to learn how to express and satisfy, as Huang Yushan had suggested? While the group laughed aloud at Xiao Ling's quick retort that the two women certainly would have sex if they only knew how, they also grappled with the question of whether, as viewers, they could see in Huihua's demands to bathe with Xiugu, to see her naked body, or to kiss her the signs of a nascent homosexual desire. Could their relationship be homosexual if it was one-sided, if only Huihua expressed those desires? Were Huihua's desires themselves the product of homosexual inclinations, or were they simply the result of her ill-fated match with the wrong man? Did the exchange of bracelets, highly valued items for both women, forge a bond between them similar to the marital tie produced by the exchange of wedding rings?

As Taiwanese viewers debated the significance of Huihua's commitment to Xiugu, they too asked under what conditions the performance of certain acts could be interpreted as a sign of homosexuality. Deborah Elliston argues that "separating sexual practices from sexual identities leaves unex-

amined the core problem of what will constitute 'sex' or 'the sexual' in either category" (1995, 849). Yet *The Twin Bracelets* clearly encouraged viewers to define the boundaries of "the sexual" by contrasting affective ties with erotic desires—although, to be fair, they offered few details as to what precisely constituted eroticism.[23] Several audience groups in Taiwan distinguished between having feelings (*ganqing*) for another person and being in a homosexual relationship. A group of office workers at a software company in an industrial district on the outskirts of Taipei concluded that Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship was one of "sisterly affection" (*jiemei ganqing*) or "close friendship" (*hen hao de pengyou*) and was not motivated by the physical needs (*shen shang de xuyao*) that for them constituted homosexuality. At a screening in a rural community in the mountains surrounding Xinzhu, Taiwan's high-tech center, a working-class Hakka man in his early fifties argued that the bond between the two protagonists was one of affection (ganqing) and he resisted describing their physical interactions as sexual in nature. He then rhetorically asked the group who had gathered on the village street to watch the film in the cool night air: "If feelings are very strong, can they attain that level?" By positing homosexuality as a scale encompassing both feelings and erotic acts, this former worker intimated that sentiment alone might be sufficient to constitute a homosexual relationship, whereas not all forms of physical contact were necessarily sexual.

A viewer in Xiamen, a major urban center a few hours from Hui'an, had presented a similar picture of a homosexual scale, yet one that privileged erotic desires. After the film ended, this university professor returned to the issue of homosexuality that she had raised when watching the scene of Huihua and Xiugu bathing together. Whereas at the time she had suggested that the two characters were homosexual, she later described their bond as one of pure feeling or affection (*ganqing chunpu de*). Unlike urban relationships that were more clear-cut, she argued theirs "had not reached the level of true homosexuality" (*meiyou da dao zhen zhen tongxinglian de cengci*). For her, their relationship had to be either erotic or affectionate; there was no ontological position that encompassed both possibilities within the scope of homosexuality.

This concept of "true homosexuality," premised on erotic desires and sexual acts, also indexed behaviors and subjective identifications that Taiwanese audiences struggled to define in relation to a Western eroticization of same-sex intimacy and its connection to modern technologies of representation. A young community organizer who participated in the rural screening outside of Xinzhu attributed *The Twin Bracelets*' message of homosexuality

to its medium: "I myself feel that it isn't homosexuality. The film's technique [*shoufa*] makes it seem very ambiguous." She later continued with specific reference to the role of mass media: "Taiwan television talks very openly about homosexuality. So we can recognize that they are homosexual. It's the influence of the media that makes us feel they are homosexual. But [the film] lacks any middle ground [to confirm this connection]. . . . There's no strong connection to sex." This woman's reactions paralleled those of Lei'a and her dui pnua, who also saw the film's homosexual potential as a product of cinematic effect rather than narrative content.

Scenes like the one of Huihua and Xiugu in the bathtub employ techniques that signified romantic and even sexual tension for these viewers, using close-up shots that frame the two characters looking deeply into one another's eyes or an extended long shot of them standing in a naked embrace, the tension enhanced by dramatic background music. An erotic reading of this particular scene is reinforced by its intratextual mirroring of a Hong Kong romance that Huihua and Xiugu have just watched in the village movie theater, a film that intersperses scenes of sexual play and passionate embraces with shots of the male lead professing undying love for his female counterpart and pleading with her to marry him.[24]

More salient for Taiwanese viewers, however, was the association of homosexuality with modernity and Western sexual identities. Mingyong, the community activist who had organized the rural viewing outside of Xinzhu, was reluctant to define Huihua's and Xiugu's bond as homosexual. He saw signs of same-sex intimacy as natural behaviors, but cautioned against using the term "homosexuality" to describe them. In Taiwan, he argued, it was still common to see men or women holding hands, whereas based on his experience in the United States, people there assumed that such couples had to be homosexual. A Rong, an employee of a gay and lesbian bookstore in Taipei where I showed *The Twin Bracelets* one hot July afternoon, offered a more subtle analysis of the impact of Western sexual discourses in Taiwan. In earlier times, his parents' generation, for instance, it was common for groups of men to socialize together, even to touch one another, while women gathered separately. No one questioned whether participants in same-sex socializing had homosexual desires. With the influence of Western concepts of homosexuality, however, physical contact between members of the same sex was no longer seen so innocently. In the last ten years or so, A Rong argued, in part due to the impact of the tongzhi movement, there had been two significant changes in Taiwanese society. On the one hand, gay and lesbian couples felt empowered to engage in acts of public affection as a

statement of their love for one another. On the other hand, all expressions of same-sex affection were now often assumed to be erotic, making groups of men or women self-conscious about walking hand-in-hand or arm-in-arm. Although A Rong himself was committed to tongzhi activism, he concluded that the influence of Western sexual discourses had limited the expression of diverse desires and passions (*qingyu*), replacing a polymorphous physicality with a more narrow and rigid identity politics.[25]

A Rong's poignant reflections on the simultaneously empowering and restrictive impact of the gay and lesbian movement reflect the uneasy relationship of many Taiwanese to Western notions of sexual subjectivity. In A Rong's and Mingyong's comments, we sense nostalgia for a time when acts and expressions of same-sex intimacy became meaningful in an environment that did not automatically eroticize such behaviors or label them as markers of sexual identity. *The Twin Bracelets* evoked these feelings of nostalgia, while at the same time it inspired many viewers to reaffirm their own modern, progressive status by displaying a familiarity with sexual-identity politics and an (at least surface) acceptance of homosexuality as a topic of public discourse. Scenes of same-sex intimacy in the film could be read as pure and innocent *in those times*, precisely because people *in those days* were not familiar with the concept of homosexuality. In this sense, Taiwanese audiences used a discourse of sexual and national modernity to distinguish themselves both from mainland Chinese they assumed were more sexually conservative and from Westerners they perceived as too quick to reduce intimate acts to sexual identity.

Nostalgia and Identification

Distances of time and place clearly shaped viewers' reactions to *The Twin Bracelets* and their experience of the film as a cinematic event, none more powerfully than the twelve-year span separating the film's original release from my screenings in 2002. Two examples highlight the tension between nostalgia and identification produced by this temporal gap and its impact on how differently situated viewers interpreted the relationship between Huihua and Xiugu. Meilin, a Taiwanese viewer who had seen *The Twin Bracelets* when it was released in 1990, watched it again with Xiao Ling's female tongzhi group. Now in her mid-thirties, Meilin worked in Taiwan's film and media industry and had been active in the tongzhi community since the early 1990s.

What struck me about Meilin's response to the film was her open acknowledgment of how dramatically her reading of it had changed over time.

When she first watched *The Twin Bracelets* in 1990, she was only a few years out of college. She recalled:

> In those days, there were very few female tongzhi films, very few. When the film was promoted it was made into [a tongzhi film], at the time we felt that we were going to see a homosexual film. I think that when I was watching it, I was extending its meaning [*yinshen*] to parts that weren't being acted. . . . For instance, I would extrapolate [*yinzao*] from the film to my own life. When I had a girlfriend in college, we could only be so intimate in public. But when we were alone of course we did much more. So I imagined that although the film had already showed you so much, nevertheless there must be much more that wasn't filmed. It had to be similar to our situation. . . . I took my own experience [with my girlfriend] and added it to the film, filled it out. Therefore, at the time, for me it was certainly a tongzhi film, a film that spoke to me.

When Meilin viewed *The Twin Bracelets* in 2002, however, she had a very different reaction: "This time I'm more realistic, so I don't see them as really being homosexual. Actually today I don't feel that they are homosexual at all."

It was precisely women such as Meilin who had approached Huang Yushan, after *The Twin Bracelets* was released in Taiwan, to share with her how the film resonated with their own same-sex relationships and erotic desires. What had changed over the decade to erase that identification? To a certain degree, we can see in Meilin's recollections a sense of nostalgia for an era when even films like *The Twin Bracelets* could be mined for potential homoerotic messages. By 2002, however, a range of films with more complex depictions of same-sex emotional and sexual intimacy had been released, recontouring the cinematic landscape so that *The Twin Bracelets* now seemed a mere shadow of the possibilities offered by Chinese-language cinema. The Hong Kong production *Zishu* (*Intimates*) (1997) was one such film, a moving, early twentieth-century portrayal of two women from southern China who find love and companionship with one another only to be separated by war and upheaval. Loosely based on the practice of sworn spinsterhood found in the Pearl River Delta region, *Intimates* offers a window onto same-sex intimacy in 1940s China through the eyes of a late twentieth-century Hong Kong woman successful in her career but a failure at heterosexual love. The members of the all-female tongzhi group who watched *The Twin Bracelets* with Meilin had also seen *Intimates*, and for them, the latter presented a range of choices for women that were not available to Huihua and Xiugu. Whereas in 1990 *The Twin Bracelets* had moved some viewers to consider

its homosexual subplot, by 2002 the emergence of tongzhi subjectivity and politics had diminished its potential for cinematic engagement and self-recognition. Instead, films such as *Intimates* inspired identification with an earlier form of same-sex love in China that resonated more closely with tongzhi viewers' own erotic experiences and desires.

Perhaps more surprising to me than Meilin's dramatic reversal was the lack of identification in the reactions of a same-sex couple from Shanlin. Soehua and Bbilei were both in their late thirties and had been together for almost ten years. Villagers often mentioned them in viewing groups and everyday conversations when discussing the subject of women who refused to marry. Although both women had originally submitted to arranged marriages, they had divorced their husbands soon after and had never remarried. They were respected in the community for being hardworking and honest, supporting themselves through a range of business ventures. In terms of the daily demands of making a living and a life together, their relationship closely resembled that of a married couple.

Familiar as I was with Soehua's and Bbilei's situation, I was eager to show them *The Twin Bracelets* and to learn whether they saw their own lives reflected in Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship. One evening Soehua closed her shop early and escorted me back to the newly built home she shared with Bbilei, so that we could watch the film in their spacious living room. After the movie ended, our conversation turned almost immediately to the topic of marriage and divorce. Both Soehua and Bbilei interpreted *The Twin Bracelets* as a tale of two dui pnua, in which one finds herself in an ill-fated marriage. Like other Shanlin viewers, they identified the story with a past era in which marriages were arranged, wives generally avoided their husbands, and divorce was rarely an option. In the present, they were quick to point out, things were quite different. Young people now found their own spouses, women were often pregnant before they married, and divorce was increasingly common. At no point in our discussion, however, did Soehua or Bbilei relate Huihua's plight to their own experiences of marriage, divorce, or same-sex intimacy.

A few days later I visited Soehua in her shop, to discuss the film further. When I asked her to compare the relationship between Huihua and Xiugu to her bond with Bbilei, Soehua was adamant that they were quite different: "For them, one wants to marry and one doesn't. So they don't get along [in the end]. We get along because we're both unmarried. It's not the same." Soehua went on to point out that because women in the past were unable to support themselves, they had few choices outside of marriage. When I

repeated what other village women had told me, that the only option for an unmarried woman was to become a Buddhist, vegetarian nun, Soehua retorted that becoming a nun was very constraining because you had to submit to the bidding of a senior nun, much as a married woman was under the thumb of her mother-in-law. She and Bbilei, by contrast, were free to do as they pleased, including traveling for pleasure, as they had done on a recent trip to Beijing.

Although Soehua's emphasis on independence and freedom might have been part of an effort to normalize a relationship that was still far from common in Shanlin, she clearly saw little in Huihua's and Xiugu's bond that resonated with her own experiences. Whereas U.S. or even Taiwanese viewers may have found striking parallels in their living situations and mutual commitments, Soehua and Bbilei saw an earlier era in which women did not have the choice to divorce their husbands and lacked the resources to refuse marriage altogether. Their lack of identification with the film reflected their own investment in a particular understanding of gender roles in Hui'an society and how those roles had changed over time; at the same time, their responses also reaffirmed the cultural specificity of a sexual reading of Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship. In my eagerness to show the film to Soehua and Bbilei, and admittedly in my disappointment that they did not see themselves in its characters' lives, I too perhaps was succumbing to the desire to know the sexual "truth" about their relationship, using *The Twin Bracelets* as a tool that would reveal that truth to me. Our encounter instead confirmed that portrayals of same-sex intimacy were not necessarily intelligible to all audiences in sexual terms. Rather, differently situated viewers saw very different forms of intimacy on the screen, not all of which were easily encapsulated by an ontology of sexual desires or identities.

Conclusion

Long before I began to study audience responses to *The Twin Bracelets*, I had a memorable encounter with a senior professor in China who had also done research in eastern Hui'an. As we sat in his study, conversing about his work and the current state of affairs in the region, he suddenly leaned toward me and asked eagerly whether Hui'an women were in fact homosexual. Taken aback by the question, I hesitated, stumbled uncomfortably over my words, and eventually muttered that it depended on how one defined homosexuality. My study of *The Twin Bracelets* is in many ways a response to the professor's probing question (which itself had nothing to do with the film) and my dissatisfaction with my reply at the time. It is not a search to "un-

cover homosexuality" in eastern Hui'an (a desire for knowledge rooted in what we might term erotic imperialism), but instead represents an effort to understand same-sex intimacy as more diffuse and complex than a simple heterosexual-homosexual binary allows.

A chapter organized around the desire for interpretive closure would be motivated by the desire to unveil, to make visible and known the sexual status of Huihua's and Xiugu's relationship. I have resisted satisfying this desire (assuming that I ever could), for it denies the multiple meanings produced by and embedded in cinematic images and viewers' interpretive practices. Such efforts to reduce the cinematic text to a singular meaning also do violence to the diverse modes through which individuals experience and conceptualize different forms of intimacy. Even among those who forge communities based on same-sex erotic desires, sexual subjectivities assume such strikingly different forms across cultural contexts that they are irreducible to an ostensibly unitary "gay" identity. Fran Martin has lucidly shown how some kinds of tongzhi discourse and activism in Taiwan are predicated not on emergence from the closet, itself a form of "ontological exposure," but instead on a mask that "dissimulates a social surface," that "privilege[s] situated enactment" (2000, 68; see also Hu 2011). The desire to make visible assumes a knowable sexual subject that Martin argues is missing from these Taiwanese tongzhi discourses that emphasize the social effects of contingent interactions over a true or false ontological status.[26] While not all tongzhi-identified men and women in Taiwan subscribe to this construction, it does offer them a different basis for sexual subjectivity, one that acknowledges the pleasures and dangers of same-sex intimacies (some physical and others not) without necessarily naming such encounters through sexual ontologies. Viewing films such as *The Twin Bracelets* enables diverse groups to reflect openly on the status of emotional attachments and erotic desires that are worried over in public discourse. In the process, such viewers establish their own bases for understanding the significance of same-sex intimacies and sexual pleasures.

Ultimately, it is more important to understand the range of responses to the film by different communities than it is to provide a definitive authorial reading. Those responses are themselves the product of specific cultural settings, sociohistorical moments, and national and global politics: the standing of Taiwan and China vis-à-vis one another, the eroticization of Asia in the West, and the global impact of a specifically Western construction of sexual identity and subjectivity. If, as Louisa Schein suggests, "the way people understand who they are and how they belong is never anterior to, indeed is

inseparable from, the kinds of media they consume" (2002, 230), then ethnographic studies of media and film consumption assume even greater importance in our efforts to comprehend the diverse ways that people continuously remake their constructions of themselves and salient others through their intimate and erotic lives. As meaning is produced and struggled over at various points in the life and circulation of *The Twin Bracelets*, the film producers and consumers engaged in that struggle define their own intimate and sexual selves and distinguish them from those of others. Their efforts reflect the hybrid and internally discontinuous modes of experiencing and understanding sex and intimacy across and between Greater China and the West.

Notes

The research on which this chapter is based was funded by a Grimm Fellowship for Travel in Asia from Washington University in St. Louis. I would like to thank Lu Zhaohuan and Huang Yushan for generously agreeing to meet with me and discuss their work. Although the members of my viewing groups must remain unnamed, I express my heartfelt thanks to the many viewers who contributed their time and thoughts to this project. My research in China and Taiwan was aided by numerous friends and colleagues, including Chu Xuan, Ding Naifei, Guo Nujing, Lee Jinmei, Lin Shu-yi, Shu Shiwei, Teri Silvio, Tiao Manpeng, Wu Weiting, Zhang Jinfu, and the staff at the Awakening Foundation and Jing Jing Shuju. An earlier version of this chapter was presented in August 2003 at the International Convention of Asia Scholars in Singapore. I am grateful to Brenda Weber and Fran Martin for careful readings of previous drafts and to Louisa Schein and Purnima Mankekar for their insightful comments and guidance at various writing stages. I, of course, remain responsible for any errors or inadequacies.

1. In addition to the San Francisco festival appearance in 1992, *The Twin Bracelets* was shown at the Chicago Lesbian and Gay International Film Festival and the International Festival of Lesbian and Gay Films in New York, both held in 1992. In St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1998 it aired at the Chinese Film Showcase focused on the theme "Sexuality in Chinese movies." The film was also screened at Cornell University in 1993 and the University of Michigan in 1997.

2. Fred Lombardi, "Shuang Cho," *Variety*, June 15, 1992.

3. By contrast, the depiction of *The Twin Bracelets* as "a lesbian version of *Raise the Red Lantern*" by organizers of the San Francisco festival was widely reproduced on English-language gay and lesbian websites and in advertisements for campus Asian film series. See the blurb for the film in the Cornell University Cinema guide (Cornell Cinema Flik Sheet, February 1993). *The Twin Bracelets* is currently housed in the Outfest Legacy Collection at the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

4. This approach assumes that the production of meaning is not static, forged at one particular moment, but instead is an ongoing process—a "hermeneutic circle" to bor-

row Michaels's term—that takes place at multiple stages of film conception, production, transmission, and reception (Michaels 1990; see also Ganti 2002).

5. I use the term "Greater China" to refer to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Chinese diaspora communities in Southeast Asia.

6. By contrast, Tom Boellstorff finds that Indonesian *lesbi* and *gay* subjectivities are constituted through mass media by a process of self-recognition that "places the self in a dialogic relationship with a *distant but familiar other*" (2003a, 232). One could argue that Taiwanese viewers also constituted themselves dialogically in relation to the Chinese characters portrayed in *The Twin Bracelets*, but that process was premised not on deictic recognition ("That's me!") but instead on disavowal ("That's *not* me!"). For a more detailed discussion of disavowed identification in viewers' responses to *The Twin Bracelets*, see S. Friedman's (2006b) study.

7. These responses also reflect how viewers integrated *The Twin Bracelets* semiotically and pragmatically into their lives and social worlds. In other words, audiences used the film as a platform for telling stories about themselves and their communities that positioned audience members in relation to prevailing social and sexual norms, identity categories, and claims to national modernity (S. Friedman 2006b; Michaels 1990). These stories enabled me to trace the connections between interpersonal and collective intimacies and to show how desires and pleasures that link individuals to larger communities are articulated through film spectatorship.

8. The villages in eastern Hui'an are known for a form of marriage described in the scholarly literature as "extended natalocal residence" (*chang zhu niangjia*). Instead of residing immediately with her husband and conjugal kin as is typical in rural Han China, a new wife remains in her natal home after her wedding, visiting her husband only when summoned by a mother-in-law or sister-in-law. This period of postmarital separation comes to an end when a woman bears her first child. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, the separation period grew increasingly shorter as young people started to choose their own spouses and to marry at a later age (see S. Friedman 2006a).

9. See also the review of Lu's work in the Hong Kong journal *Guang jiao jing* (Wide angle), in which the reviewer suggests that Lu attributes women's individual and collective suicides not only to the sexual repression and restraint produced by feudal marriages but also to "abnormal sexual relations," which the author identifies as homosexuality (Ren 1989, 64). Since this time, a more varied array of fiction has emerged in China that openly engages female same-sex desires and intimacies (Sang 2003; Martin 2010). For an excellent discussion of the portrayal of love and eroticism between women in earlier Ming-Qing literature, see Wu's (2002) study.

10. Yinhe Li, "Shuang zhuo: Bei jianta de nüxing beige" [The twin bracelets: A lament over female abuse], *Lianhe bao*, April 11, 1990. This aversion to identifying Huihua as a lesbian resembles the responses of some Indian reviewers of the film *Fire* who eschewed a lesbian label in favor of emphasizing the film's challenge to traditional gender roles and values (Patel 2002, 224).

11. Huang listed *Xiamen xinniang* (Xiamen bride), a joint Taiwan-China television serial made by Wang Benhu in the early 1990s (see S. Friedman 2006a, 209–10); *Wuge*

nüzi he yi gen shengzi (Five women and a rope) (1990), a joint Taiwan-Hong Kong production filmed in China; and *Nü shu* (Women's script), a Chinese film directed by Yang Yueqing. Other films in this genre include Wang Jin's Chinese production *Guafu cun* (The village of widows), which is also based on a short story by Lu Zhaohuan.

12. With the exception of the director and short-story author, all personal names used in this article are pseudonyms.

13. These tales bear striking similarities to some late imperial fiction in which female intimacy is portrayed as compatible with polygamous marriages (Sang 2003, 49–52; Wu 2002). Late imperial portrayals of "utopian polygamy" were generally written from a male perspective; however, Shanlin viewers' responses reflected the power of female same-sex intimacy to deflect marital challenges and even deny husbands sexual access to their wives.

14. There is an extensive literature on same-sex intimacy in single-sex school environments, one that I do not have the space to review here. Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, Chinese intellectuals engaged in heated debates about the benefits and dangers of such relationships. Their debates were influenced as much by traditional notions of homosociality as by theories introduced by Western sexologists whose works were being translated into Chinese (Sang 2003, ch. 4; Sieber 2001, 12–14). See the work of Hu (2011) and Martin (2010) for contemporary analyses of schoolgirl romances, and that of Silvio (2008) for a critique of environmental lesbianism.

15. "Tongzhi" is a term of self-identification used by the Chinese in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan who identify broadly as "gay and lesbian" or "queer." For a discussion of the history of the term and its use as a positive form of identification among groups in contemporary Chinese societies, see the work of Chou (2000) and Martin (2000; 2003). Some lesbians in Taiwan and China also identify with the term *lala* or *lazi*. See Lim's (2008) study on the adoption of the term *ku'er* (queer) in Taiwan.

16. For examples of the rapidly growing Chinese-language literature on this subject, see the work of Chao (2001), He (2001, 2009), Zheng (1997), and Zhuang (1990, 2002).

17. It is also likely that Xiao Ling was unable to imagine a sexual relationship with A Cao because both of them identified as "T," which is short for "tomboy." The distinction between *T*s and *po*s (from *laopo*, a colloquial term for "wife") structures the female tongzhi community in Taiwan by creating gendered role divisions and a culturally specific logic of desire (irreducible to the butch-femme binary). Although not all women identify themselves this way, for those who do, the thought of one T desiring another T is difficult to imagine (Chao 1996, 2000; Fishel 1994; Hu 2011).

18. In her review of Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*, Gayatri Gopinath contends that the film's portrayal of an erotic relationship between two sisters-in-law both questions and reaffirms this developmental narrative of sexual identity. *Fire* "interrogates the notion that the proper location of lesbianism is within a politics of visibility in the public sphere," Gopinath argues, while at the same time the film becomes legible to its diasporic audiences within a Euroamerican discourse that faults Indians for lacking the very language to articulate lesbianism and thus make it visible (1998, 631, 633). See Leung's (2008, 1) study for another example of this teleological narrative.

19. For a history of the terminology used to indicate same-sex love in twentieth-century China, see Kang's (2010) work on male same-sex relations and Sang's (2003, ch. 4) work on female same-sex bonds. Sang argues that the coinage "same-sex love" (*tongxing ai*) entered Chinese from Japanese in the early twentieth century and expanded into variants such as *tongxing lian'ai* and *tongxinglian* (all combinations of the words for "same," "sex," and "love").

20. Sociologist Li Yinhe argues in her preface to a book of interviews with self-identified gay men in contemporary China, "Although homosexual subculture is not [part of] mainstream culture in China, it is entering into mainstream discourse" (Chen Liyong 2003, n.p.). My discussions with viewing groups in Shanlin affirmed this discursive dissemination, especially among the younger generation. I should emphasize, however, that a discursive presence does not necessarily imply social acceptance, as A Ping's subsequent comments revealed.

21. Chris Berry finds a similar tension between behavior and identity in East Asian films centered on gay characters and their family relationships. He concludes that "what is a problem for the family in these films is not sexual behavior in itself but an exclusive sexual orientation whose development into an exclusive sexual and social identity in turn interferes with the ability to perform one's role in the family" (2001, 215). Although it is not clear from A Ping's story whether her aunt had developed "an exclusive sexual orientation," it is certainly the aunt's decision to abandon her roles as wife and mother that A Ping found particularly unsettling.

22. For other writings on male and female tongzhi communities in urban China, see the work of Engebretsen (2009), He and Rofel (2010), Y. Li (1998a; 1998b, 207–24), Rofel (2007a, 2010), and Sang (2003, 169–73).

23. This tension between *qing* (feeling or sentiment) and *yu* (desire) figures prominently in Chinese literary representations of women's same-sex relationships (Sang 2003; Wu 2002).

24. This film, *Qing cheng zhi lian* (Love in a fallen city), released in 1984, stars Chow Yun-fat and Cora Miao in a romantic drama based on a novel by Eileen Chang. In the wake of the Japanese invasion of Shanghai and Hong Kong, Chow woos a previously divorced Miao and rescues her from familial and social ostracism.

25. By contrast, through her analysis of the film *Silent Thrush*, Silvio (2008) argues that lesbian desire may be seen as a foundational component of local ethnonationalist nostalgia in Taiwan.

26. Tze-lan Sang similarly argues that when Western sexological writings were translated into Chinese in the early twentieth century, the notion of a sexual identity was often omitted and replaced by an understanding of same-sex love as embedded in relationships and situations: "Republican Chinese intellectuals' focus on the relational and situational qualities of same-sex attraction may reflect a different but equally valid imagination about human subjectivity—one that sees it as dependent on context rather than as essential and unchanging" (2003, 123).

[9] HEATHER DELL

BORN UNDER WESTERN EYES

The Politics and Erotics of the Documentary Gaze in *Born into Brothels*

The resulting film is moving, charming and sad, a tribute to Ms. Briski's indomitability and to the irrepressible creative spirits of the children themselves.

—A. O. SCOTT, *NEW YORK TIMES* FILM REVIEW

Why did [Briski and Kauffman, the film's directors] show only the seamy side of [sex workers'] lives and not the positives, especially how they have been raising their children and protecting them from harm?

—PARTHA BANERJEE, THE FILM'S TRANSLATOR, LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE *TELEGRAPH*

We fear the global recognition of such a film, giving a one-sided view of the lives of sex workers in a third world country, may do a lot of harm to the global movement of sex workers for their rights and dignity. It can even have an impact on their hard-won victories for rights, unstigmatized healthcare, and access to resources.

—SWAPNA GAYEN, SECRETARY, DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA COMMITTEE, LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE *TELEGRAPH*

The camera zooms in on what appear to be small brown moths flying weightlessly around a bright bare bulb hanging from a ceiling, a delicate dancing fragility, slowed and grainy, their presence intensified. Next, we see a child's eyes watching something to her left; her brown skin and a small dot, or bindi, on her forehead are clear. Her gaze shifts to center on the camera, a knowing look joins her to us as her fellow observers. She looks at us just before we see a narrow alleyway that leads to a red-lit destination.[1]

So begins the award-winning documentary *Born into Brothels*. It offers us in the first few frames the narrative of a child who invites us to view what is framed as the suffocating, narrow path into prostitution she is facing. We are invited to solve this problem with and for her through Zana Briski, a photographer who entered the red light district of Sonagachi, in Kolkata (Calcutta), India, to study the lives of sex workers. This film presents a double move, delivering titillating erotic access yet immediately providing the alibi of an entreaty for a "return" to normative innocence through the rescue of the children. This contradiction of erotic solicitation, illicit consumption, and erotophobic judgment is the crux of the film.

Born into Brothels introduces us to eight children said to be living in brothels, suffering under "conditions of abject poverty and abuse."[2] Briski explains that she arrived in Sonagachi to live in the community, in hopes of photographing women in sex work. Finding this difficult, she changed her focus to teaching photography to children of sex workers, providing cameras and instruction. Footage of individual children speaking to the camera, red light district alleys and rooms, and each child's photos depicting what they see fills the early frames of the film. Briski's presence becomes more explicit as her actions tell us how she takes the children on day trips to the zoo and the beach, showing them what she sees as a world beyond their experience. As she spends time with the children, she decides to use their photographs to raise awareness in order to avert what she sees as their certain future, the girls' entering into sex work at a young age and the boys' facing few employment opportunities. To fund their separation from the red light district through possible entry into boarding schools, Briski arranges an auction of the children's photographs at Sotheby's, in New York. She struggles to find schools willing to take children of sex workers, to obtain multiple government documents like food-ration cards required for admission, and to cajole parents hesitating to let their children go. As the film ends, five of the eight children go to boarding school, and three stay enrolled.

Sonagachi is the largest of Kolkata's six major red light districts, with an estimated sex-worker population of twelve thousand.[3] Sonagachi has a broad spectrum of clientele, including college students, professionals such as doctors and engineers, shopkeepers, taxi drivers, and manual laborers. However, its mainstay is businessmen who live in the city or visit Kolkata. Like the diversity of its clientele, Sonagachi has a variety of sex-worker labor forms, from the comparatively wealthy, updated versions of courtesans called *agrawallis* to the three more widely practiced forms of sex work: indenture, com-

mon for new arrivals (*chokri*); working for 50 percent commission (*adhiya*); and paying a set daily rent (*nijay ashi*, or on my own).

Documentaries rely on convincing us that they bear a direct relation to the historical world and therefore on their "ability to induce us to derive larger lessons, broader outlooks, or more overarching concepts from the detail [they] provide" (Nichols 1991, 234). The film and the accolades it has received are very much a part of a U.S. media discourse that continues to constitute and amplify the fascination with, and yet the vilification of, erotic diversity and differently raced, ethnicized, sexualized, gendered, and classed configurations and membership in families.

The film delivers the voyeuristic intrigue of seeing into the officially disparaged space of the red light district, excitingly sexual and seductive, accompanied by the alibi that viewers are looking at the request of children who need us to witness and rescue. By Briski's teaching the children the medium of photography, the children's photographs further alibi our voyeurism under the assumption that they will subject their surroundings to the judging gaze, and that such objectification will aid their "rescue." However, the film differs from Victorian rescue narratives in that it questions not only the competence of brown men, but also of brown women, leaving only children as worthy. This reinvention of the rescue narrative fits well, as we will see, with a current Christian moral panic that takes shape in the demonization of sexual others, such as prostitute mothers. Politically, this has fed increased interest in sex-worker families as synonymous with sex trafficking, resulting in U.S. policy that withholds funds from nongovernmental organizations and governments that work with sex-worker rights organizations. These sex-worker organizations, like India's Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (the Unstoppable Women's Coordinating Committee), have been global leaders not only in implementing safer sex through sex-worker empowerment, but also in advocating for respecting sex workers' rights to have, raise, and educate their own children.

Born into Brothels resonates in the context of U.S. fears and desires both morally and economically. Spectators in the United States often see the red light district of *Born into Brothels* as illustrative of "Asia's" erotic availability and horrifying immorality. At the same time, the red light district of Asia functions in many American imaginations as emblematic of a globalizing market, where outsourcing jobs is seen as undercutting U.S. wages and job security. The rising Indian market's impact on the U.S. economy is part of the fear of diminishing U.S. global power.

As an activist-scholar, I used participant observation and conducted over eighty interviews of sex workers in Sonagachi and the working-class red light district of Kalighat, in Kolkata, from 1993 onward. For more than a decade, I have listened to the kinds of assumptions and questions that U.S. audiences bring. Like Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, I have interacted with various nongovernmental organizations, including the pro-rescue Sanlaap, which they include in the film, and the sex-worker rights organization Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, which they do not. In order to contribute to an ongoing dialogue among overlapping groups of spectators, sex workers, researchers, policymakers and other constituencies, I analyze *Born into Brothels* by placing it in the context of my research in Sonagachi, the writings of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, and other activist scholarship. In particular, I am interested in the tension between multiple, contestant voices and what I see as the necessity of activist work that seeks representational strategies to intervene in hostile public discourses. Media events are powerful discourses that can maintain or rewrite barriers between sex-work communities and non-sex workers, even as they appear to transcend them. Furthermore, they can underwrite policy that withholds international funding and locally cuts the politically allocated supply of utilities, like water and other resources, to red light areas. The questions for me are always how hostile discourses potentially impinge on life in red light districts and what responses there are from activists in these communities. Finally, what representational strategies can we put into play not only as scholars, but as members of a global community of activists?

Context

Born into Brothels won the Academy Award in 2005 for best documentary feature. It has been the winner of numerous accolades, including Sundance's audience award, the L.A. Film Critics award for best documentary of the year, audience and best documentary awards at a number of sizable film festivals (Atlanta, Bermuda, Chicago, Cleveland, Durango, Nashville, Newport Beach, Portland, Seattle, Sydney), and prizes from the U.S.-based international nongovernmental organizations Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Most major newspaper film reviewers and self-appointed reviewers on the Amazon.com website gave it favorable treatment.[4] Yet, the reaction to *Born into Brothels* has not been all positive. A few critics found it lacking in context and emotionally manipulative: "As the scenes with Zana Auntie pile up, we start to wonder: Who's the subject here, anyway? Certainly not the children's parents, who serve as little more than potty-

mouthed props. How about some insight into what makes the adults tick?"[5] Reactions in important scholarly and Indian media have been sporadically critical, raising questions about the disregard and disrespect for the sex-worker community and the global South. A reporter from the Indian national newsmagazine *Frontline* wrote, "If *Born into Brothels* were remade as an adventure-thriller in the tradition of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, its posters might read: 'New York film-maker Zana Briski sallies forth among the natives to save souls'" (Swami 2005). This is a decidedly different view from American reviewers who saw Briski and coproducer Kauffman as morally courageous: "The obstacles are stupendous, but so is Briski's indomitability."[6]

Why does *Born into Brothels* play so well in the United States now? Three contextual themes emerge. First is the influence of the Christian conservative movement on U.S. foreign policy over the last three decades. Second, the initiatives of secular organizations have created international awareness and concern about human trafficking. Finally, the United States is now experiencing anxiety about its economic place in the world.

The film provides an opportunity to reformulate a moral panic that carries traces of a Christian sexual-purity narrative dating from the 1800s, regarding gender and sexuality. A current fundamentalist Christian incarnation of this narrative shows itself in part in the racialized, patriarchal administration of recent U.S. presidents—conjoining the "protection" of particular family forms and children through the regulation of brown women's bodies. "For over a century, no tactic for stirring up erotic hysteria has been as reliable as the appeal to protect children" (Rubin 1989, 271). An important victory for the Christian Right was the Bush administration's global gag rule, implemented in 2005, ensuring no U.S. funds would go to organizations and governments that supported sex-worker rights.[7] On an international level, the Christian Right's concerns translate into the protection of brown children, protection from not only brown men but brown women as well. *Born into Brothels* contributes to a moralistic and nostalgic neocolonial unease, administered by portraying Indian adults as irresponsible parents and hyper-desiring sexualized adults. Longing to reestablish the moral order of an imperial relationship through infantilization, the focus on Briski's relationship with Indian children positions the West as the concerned, deeroticized parent and therefore, perhaps, the morally correct and rightful, if imperfect, imperial governor. Given *Born into Brothels*' narrative of the corrupting, adult Asian world, only the next generation of children seems worthy of saving.

The broad-ranging support for *Born into Brothels* coincides with an escalating concern over human trafficking and the debate between abolishing sex work and enhancing sex workers' rights in the mid-1990s, at international conferences including the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995. In 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was passed under U.S. president Bill Clinton's administration. Due to strenuous lobbying by Christian fundamentalists and prostitution-abolitionist feminists, the TVPA, which concentrates on sex trafficking, won out over a more progressive bill, which focused on the problem of forced labor in every industry, without stigmatizing sexual labor per se. The progressive bill was broadly supported by the State Department and organizations like the Prostitutes' Educational Network and the Center for Health and Gender Equity.[8] While the Bush administration labeled the TVPA's demand that grant recipients commit to not working with sex-worker rights organizations, the "Prostitution Loyalty Oath," opponents of the TVPA, observing the way the oath undermined AIDS-prevention work in which sex-worker empowerment is the critical factor in effectively negotiating with customers for condom use, renamed it the "Anti-Prostitute Oath."[9]

The United Nations Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which includes contradictory definitions of trafficking, and the TVPA invited high-profile media exposés "featuring sordid stories of global trafficking networks and the women and children ensnared in their web" (Soderlund 2005, 74).[10] The rise of intertwined erotophobic and antitrafficking ideologies is an important part of the U.S. political context in which *Born into Brothels* won numerous awards.

The political and economic backdrop for the reception of *Born into Brothels* is the increasing U.S. anxiety about its current and future place in the world (Buruma 2008). "America feels unsure of its value in a number of domains: world military politics, global economics, ecological practice, and in the claim that the nation has a commitment to sustaining justice, democracy, and the American dream when there seems to be less money and reliable work to go around" (Berlant 1997, 18). This anxiety about the near future may explain why the next generation, vis-à-vis the figure of the child, has become iconic of the nation. Politicians are able to justify legislation based on the purported protection of future citizens.

The American anxiety that haunts the red light market of *Born into Brothels* may also be a growing reaction to the fact that former colonies such as India are making inroads into the market. Setting aside its protectionist

import-substitution strategy that had been in place for the decades following independence from Britain in 1947, India came more fully into the international marketplace in the early 1990s, with large-scale manufacturing and diversified production. India no longer fits neatly into the traditional "colonial division of labor" in which the global North was able to extract profits from their raw materials and cheapened labor.[11] With the push for neoliberal, "free market" capitalism in which capital, jobs, and goods can cross national boundaries more easily than people, a neoliberal India has become a growing location for outsourced jobs, undercutting not only working-class but also middle-class job security in the United States.[12] Under British colonialism and now Euroamerican neoimperialism, India has been, and continues to be, fantasized as a tantalizing opportunity for extracted riches and as a threatening epicenter of marketplace competition. Little wonder that the American spectator, through the eye of the camera in *Born into Brothels*, seems to stride, haunt, and pace the streets in lengthy shots of the Indian Lal bazaar, or "red market," full of bodies ready to work, at once banal and mysterious amid speeding "ethnic" music that might be interpreted as exotic and foreboding.[13]

A Paradox of Erotic Consumption and Judgment

If *Born into Brothels* had been about the children of sweepers living under similar conditions and challenges, it is unlikely that it would have received U.S. accolades. Central to the film's appeal is the delivery of erotic consumption through solicitation in the red light district, alongside the moral narrative of rescuing children.

Born into Brothels belongs to a welter of Western media representations of Asia or "the Orient" as a place in the Western imagination of "not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sexuality, [and] unlimited desire" (Said 1979, 188). The "almost uniform association between the Orient and sex" in the Western imagination was for well over a hundred years "as standard a commodity as any available in mass culture" (Said 1979, 188, 190). The allure of recent bestselling books like *Memoirs of a Geisha* continue to deliver this erotic engagement (Allison, this volume). The renewed interest in the United States for consuming Asia as sexual commodity has to do in part with U.S. struggles over the diversification of sexual ideology. The Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush years have certainly delivered an intensified dialectic about what is "deviant" and what should be normative.

The opening moments of the film demonstrate the paradox of erotic consumption and judgment of sex-work solicitation. The filmmakers allow the

viewer covert positioning as a consumer (or perhaps a john) free of guilt and monetary obligation to the sex workers who supply the performance. At the same time, it is the eyes of children in intimate close-up, looking at their surroundings, who seem to invite (or perhaps solicit) the viewer to judge the guilt of sex workers and customers as negligent or abusive adults. It is a satisfying double move of objectification of the adults, titillating and judging, and yet presumably compassionately identifying with the children (Mulvey 2000).[14]

A particular vision of the red light district is made available as the camera takes the spectator past nighttime solicitation in the alleyways where women stand on display and men stroll and evaluate. The camera allows us intimate access yet "clean," disembodied distance by positioning the men between the video camera and the sex workers.[15] The spectator becomes both a potential customer looking over women (and children) while being simultaneously differentiated from the customers in the frame. At other times, by shooting sex workers soliciting from a child's eye level as we follow the children's small forms moving through the lively nighttime streets, the film seemingly absolves us again of explicit erotic consumption. Instead, following in the wake of children surrounded by sexual commerce, the voyeuristic gaze becomes "the normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them" (Foucault 1977, 25).[16]

Born into Brothels is a plea for a "return" to normative innocence, even while it delivers erotic access. It has been coded as the children's film, mediated and ostensibly shaped by their standpoint, their story, their voices, and photographic stills. It provides a guilty pleasure of gazing into the "sordid," private spaces of sex workers' work and family, incitement to a prurient fascination. The film can be furtively sought as hoped-for porn by officially moralistic spectators, because it is seemingly rendered wholesome by making the children complicit in the objectification and fetishization of their mothers' worlds as well as their own. The use of photography is central to this process.

"Through the Eyes of a Child": Transformation Using the Gaze

The spectator's gaze into a red light district is officially recuperated in the hands of the children and the cameras they are given.[17] In the words of one of the most widely read Amazon.com reviewers, "The best thing about '*Born into Brothels*' is that it allows the children to tell their stories in their own words. . . . The documentary is dominated by interviews with the children

and by their photographs, with occasional voiceovers or footage of Zana Briski."[18] Many Amazon.com and newspaper film reviewers focused on how "simply teach[ing the children] the art of photography" would allow them "to express themselves."[19] As one Amazon.com reviewer wrote, "They have witnessed humans at their worst, and no one outside wishes to bear the weight of such witness. Yet, they will not be silenced, and if we do not wish to hear them speak, then Briski has given them cameras to let them capture their worlds, inside and out, and bring them to us."[20] The language of these reviewers is rife with the message that "photography has broadened their outlook," photography which begins by "peering through a lens into the darkest shadows of life—into the world of prostitution" but leads to "expos-[ing] them to a larger world view" beyond the world of the red light district.[21] The camera becomes a means for the children, reshaping their evaluation of the world around them, and bringing them "alive with new hopes and goals," providing them with "a fighting chance slim as it is to a life of normalcy."[22] According to a reviewer at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Briski "is not just documenting these unfortunate children, but letting them document, and therefore consider, their own circumstances as she introduces the possibility of escape."[23]

The Westerner's use of the camera and the sudden ability of the "native" to picture self and surroundings through a photograph have a strong history in representing an imperial relationship. "Historically, it was first the mirror and then the camera that were thought to prove the superiority of the Westerner who invented and controls them" (Lutz and Collins 1994). Like many mid-twentieth-century National Geographic photographs displaying the reaction of natives to the camera and resulting photographs, Briski's lessons to the children to photograph each other, their families, and the red light district suggests her delivery of technological modernity. Indeed, their "epiphany of newly acquired self knowledge" is made available largely through the hands of a white person (Lutz and Collins 1994).

In addition to these photographs, the genre of documentary Briski employs, interactive rather than simply expository, with its voice-of-god narrator, contributes to formulating a connection between the children, the filmmaker, and her prospective audience in the global North. "The interactive documentary stresses images of testimony or verbal exchange and images of documentation. . . . Textual authority shifts towards the social actors recruited: their comments and responses provide a central part of the film's argument" (Nichols 1991, 44). The interviews are delivered as conversations as each child speaks directly and knowingly into the camera, form-

ing a growing relationship between child and spectator from the "outside" world. Clearly, in the world of this film, Briski's distribution of cameras and, by extension, the very act of filming appear to give the children a growing critical awareness and a means to reach someone who might make a difference: the viewer is represented by and through a sole white, British-born, and American-based woman (Zana Briski) who must find a way out for these children.[24] This is the story that Briski purports to tell, often using hidden cameras, interviewing the underage children, and using necessarily selective editing.

PhotoVoice and the Children of Asia

This film exemplifies a growing movement and method called photovoice, in which "the disenfranchised and marginalized, the voiceless Other, have the tools to speak in the universal language that is photography," says Philip Jones Griffiths, patron of PhotoVoice, the organization that bears the name of the broadly used term.[25] PhotoVoice is intended to carry "the views and stories of members of marginalized groups out into the world," to showcase their "newly gained skills" and "even [to] earn much needed income."[26] As in Briski's work, there is an assumed need to teach media technology in order to "develop" recipients. Photography is represented as "the vital opportunity to tell their stories for themselves."[27] Yet, the PhotoVoice website nearly replicates the symbolism of moral judgment and rescue that Briski uses, linking children to poor living conditions and then supplying a metaphor of uplift through Western intervention. Just as the PhotoVoice website uses birds to symbolize escape, Briski uses kites rising up from children's hands, far over the confines of the brothel area, supplemented by the light, soaring music of a flute. This vision of escape is linked to displaying each child's photos with the same dreamy flute. Such "truths" are often standard images that fulfill apparent desires for the well-to-do seeking titillation via media depictions of the global South as unrelieved urban slum, or what some are calling "poverty pornography," a term used to name the subsequent but similar fascination with the iconography of the celebrated film *Slumdog Millionaire*.

The question remains, do those using photovoice (including Briski) provide a space for "communication from below," or a means by which the marginalized, particularly children from nations of the South, are constructed as mute and then edited and spoken for? If the accolades and predominantly positive reviews of *Born into Brothels* are anything to go by, the problem of neoimperialism and resultant inequality is abridged into something "manageable" through personal, Western charity (in the form of Briski) and the

children's individuated aspirations to achieve their (perhaps Americanized) dreams. By representing and objectifying iconic aspects of their surroundings though photographs, which Briski then auctions off at Sotheby's to raise money for the children's boarding school education, their purported dreams can be realized.

Neither PhotoVoice nor Briski's affiliated organization of Kids with Cameras attend to "unequal looking relations" (Griffiths 2002, 328), in which they snap and to which we gaze in the far off frames of well-to-do galleries. In viewing the PhotoVoice website, spectators will obtain little context that suggests that corporate globalization, the latest incarnation of Euroamerican imperialism, and a rising international class of elites extracts wealth out of impoverishment of Asian working-class families. Rather, with the infusion of mediated technology, PhotoVoice suggests in one of its Asian program locations that "working class children can perhaps effectively overcome the Bangladeshi political inequality."[28] PhotoVoice website images can shoot views that exclude the sewing machines of Dhaka's textile export factories that frequently pay less than working-class parents need to keep their children fed. How might Briski reinscribe or transgress PhotoVoice's view of parents in Asia?

Sex Work and Parental Fitness

Born into Brothels examines parental fitness by bringing the viewer, through the camera, into Indian families. Beyond the alleyways lined with sex workers and customers, we are led into the small quarters where sex-worker mothers prepare themselves for work while fathers seem to look on passively or do drugs rather than perform the supposedly normatively masculine roles as disciplinarians and breadwinners. Many of the film's reviewers can be represented by this comment: "We are suitably horrified by their parents, the uncaringness of their uncles and, worse, the bureaucracy that seems more interested in getting the right form signed in triplicate."[29] Yet, the film does present some variation among the children's familial relationships. One child's father is reported to have tried to sell his daughter; another father looks on in a hashish fog while his son makes recalcitrant drinkers pay up for unlicensed liquor. One child, whom Briski reports is expected to join the family business of sex work, is the darling of the mother and grandmother, while another sex-worker mother worries about her daughter's future. She continues in the work, but keeps her daughter and son separated from it by a curtain in the room or by sending them up to the roof terrace to play when a customer arrives. One somewhat older girl has an aunt who purportedly

plans to send her into sex work in Mumbai, where she can earn more for the family, and one young girl says, "I have to do something with my sewing and photography. I need to make a living and take care of my sister and me." A young boy dreams, "I wish I could take Puja away from here," perhaps expressing a longing to restore heroic masculine intervention in an upside-down world where women and children earn and men appear to be idle.

In a moment of onscreen maternal care, a young son is loudly resisting being bathed by his mother and grandmother. When a verbal fight erupts between sex-worker mothers, one woman encourages the mother to beat her noisy son saying, "Beat that son of a bitch! Beat the son of a cunt fucking bitch!" The other responds, "Oh god! You are not the only one who's brought up kids! . . . Acting the part of the butt-fucking saintly wife!" thereby accusing the other mother of interfering and a holier-than-thou arrogance. Briski chooses to represent this sex worker as a mother who is open to an accusation hurled by the woman who yells, "You fucked your son and your grandson!" While the scene is one of the few moments of supposedly rare maternal care, it is nonetheless a spectacle of what many will read as deviance and violence. It is an explicit accusation of mixing blood kinship with sex—incest—one of the most vilified acts in contemporary U.S. culture, and one thought to cause irreparable damage to the child. Briski's constant and explicit expectation that female children will be trafficked into sex work by their families is consistent with her valuation of sex-worker families as sites of erotic excess, providing no apparent sexual boundaries between children and adults.

Not Fallen or De-eroticized Mothers

A growing number of activists and scholars—including sex workers—are challenging the construction of prostitution as "a social or psychological characteristic of women, often indicated by 'whore,'" arguing that the sexual labor women perform be called sex work, recognizing it as "an income-generating activity" (Kempadoo 2005, 3).[30] *Born into Brothels* relies on the reductionist binary of, in the words of the Sonagachi-based sex-worker activist organization Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, "de-sexed motherhood and domesticity" and the prostitute as "'fallen woman'—a sex machine, unfettered by any domestic inclination or 'feminine' emotion."[31] Gayle Rubin, in her classic "Thinking Sex" states, "Modern Western societies appraise sex acts according to a hierarchical system of sexual value. Marital, reproductive heterosexuals alone are at the top of the erotic pyramid,"

while sex workers are often grouped by the mainstream among "the most despised" (1989, 279). Rubin is not simply discussing sex acts, but a hierarchal ordering of desires.

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, or the Unstoppable Women's Coordination Committee, is an organization of sex workers with more than six thousand members, lobbying for workers' rights at the state headquarters in Sonagachi.[32] Because it challenges the standard narrative of rescue, Durbar has struggled to gain visibility in the media. Along with a number of activist organizations, Durbar claims the right to be sexually active in and beyond marriage with other adults while retaining the right to have and raise children: "We feel that every woman has the right to bear children if she so wishes. But we also think that through trying to establish motherhood as the only primary goal for a woman the patriarchal power structures try to control women's reproductive functions and curb their social and sexual autonomy."[33]

In contrast, Briski and the majority of the film reviewers rarely question the dominant ideology suggesting that commercial sex is a form of immorality rather than work. This renders the variety of parent-child ties presented illegitimate or void. A film reviewer for the *Arizona Republic* challenges this ideology. He cannot judge, because the documentary "gives us surprisingly little information: There is no context. We are never told even basic things, such as . . . what the cultural expectations are for prostitutes, or for women in general, or what the Indian cultural norms are for children."[34]

Born into Brothels provides little footage exploring the ways mothers structure the possible division between family and work. In my interviews with sex workers in Sonagachi and Kalighat, some mothers spoke of renting a separate room elsewhere, sending the children to be cared for in the village, the use of screens or separate levels in a room because rent is high in locations like Sonagachi, and how they wished they had more of an ability to keep work and family separate. One woman working in Sonagachi explained that she had only one room, which was difficult: "I had just one room. It was hard work. When customers arrived, if the boys were studying with their tutor, I had to wait outside with my customer or use someone else's room. So, I took another room upstairs. They live upstairs, and I use the room downstairs." Some sex workers said their children knew what their mothers did for a living. Others had not been told until mothers thought their children would have the maturity to see beyond the discrimination sex workers face.

Assumptions that sex workers are incapable of parenting children co-

9.1. Members of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, the sizable sex-workers' rights activist organization, march to the first National Sex Workers' Conference, 1997. Courtesy of Mrinal Kanti Dutta of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

9.2. A Durbar coordinator leads a discussion with STD-prevention peer educators who will then go on their rounds in Sonagachi. Courtesy of Mrinal Kanti Dutta of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

incide with hegemonic, prurient expectations that sexual minorities have an omnivorous excess of erotic longing. This expectation constitutes sexual minorities that have no boundaries and, as such, who are eager to sexually abuse or violate their children.[35] How do sex-worker activists suggest intervening in underage sex work?

Regulating Entry by Age

A major concern in *Born into Brothels* is that children have been or will be eroticized as sexual objects and pressured into sex work. As one film reviewer states, these children are "born to prostitutes and fac[e] certain futures in servitude to the sex trade."[36] In my interviews, mothers working in the sex trade voiced a variety of viewpoints, with many hoping their children would seek other, less-demanding work, and others said they would respect their children's decision to enter the trade once they were old enough. Most wanted their children to have a choice as to what kind of work they would take up and when.

Although the filmmakers said they could not get adequate access to the lives of prostitutes and therefore shifted their attention to the children, Durbar has welcomed some researchers and an occasional filmmaker in the hopes of getting representation for their approach, which counters the dominant rescue narrative. Durbar has set up self-regulatory boards in a number of red light districts in West Bengal. One sex worker, a member of Durbar, explains: "To make sure that children don't get into this profession, we are going forward. We have created a board. So a newcomer has to come in front of the board and if she is eighteen years of age, of marriageable age and claims her family is in trouble and she needs to help them, we will assess where the problem is. How much money does she need and does she know the implications of being a sex worker, can she accept it?" When a new person enters the trade, the board investigates whether the person is eighteen years or older and has taken up the work without coercion. Durbar can arrange for the new arrival to return home if he or she is underage or wishes to do so, providing an explanation to family that does not mention sex work. Or, if preferred, Durbar members can educate him or her by explaining how the business functions, including the different types of economic agreements between madam or landlady and worker, and the accompanying benefits and hazards.[37] *Born into Brothels*' silence about these boards is a choice that erases representation of one form of collective agency occurring in sex-worker labor activism taking place in Sonagachi.

Indian Neglect and the White Woman's Burden

Scene: the camera focuses on an older male clerk who writes one child's name on a government form needed for access to school. His hand moves on a piece of paper, misspelling the child's name. He attempts to respell it on the official form, under direction from Briski's group. Again, the child's name is misspelled. Finally, with a messy cross-out reminiscent of a child's copybook, he claps his hand to his head, laughs, and anticipates laboriously crowding the child's correct name into the narrow margin of the form.

A standard justification for keeping locations like India under colonial rule was the assumed necessity of supplying proper white, Christian, custodial oversight. A number of British and American women since the 1800s have represented themselves as bearing a white woman's burden that requires assuming the "moral responsibility" of acting as the guardians of victimized women and children in India, holding out the promise of redemption (Burton 1992; Mohanty 1991).[38] *Born into Brothels* resurrects the parallel drawn between the supposed failure of family leadership and the impudence of allowing Indian self-rule, as well as the need for foreign intervention. The documentary is thus part of a longer genealogy of maternal imperialism and racialized motherhood (Burton 1992, 144, 138). Many argued for saving brown women and children from brown men (Spivak 2008). Yet there is a significant shift in the contemporary narrative. In this neoimperial iteration, Briski finds only the brown children worth saving since brown women have become culpable, rather than infantilized victims.

Scene: in a small crowded room with dark walls, a young girl stands nicely clothed in a school uniform, her hair neatly combed, waiting. She stands quietly above her kneeling grandmother, who shifts through disheveled papers piled on the floor, looking at one, then another, unable to find the right document that will allow her charge to go to school. Fade to black.

Spectators see Zana Briski's slim figure clothed in androgynous slacks and shirt, striding through the city in search of educational opportunity for the children. Briski's image contrasts with that of ineffectual grandmothers and full-figured mothers adjusting their saris and deepening their eyeliner as they get ready for work, or as they wipe on cold cream after an evening's work. As the film continues, the children call Briski "Zana Auntie," constructing her as the children's surrogate family. As one Amazon.com reviewer wrote, "The work of Auntie Zana, the woman who teaches them photography, is wonderful. She shows true care for the kids, fighting for their educations and futures."[39] Through this selective contrast, many reviewers

interpret her as a model of appropriately responsible and asexualized adult behavior in the face of perversity, serving a moralizing agenda.[40] Intriguingly, the Bengali word for aunt, *masi*, is translated only when applied to Briski, but remains one of the few words not translated in the subtitles when children use it to name a brothel manager who is called auntie (*Geeta Masi*, or Aunt Geeta), a common usage for brothel managers in red light districts. The lack of translation upholds a constructed division between the red light district and Briski, attaching the status of family to her rather than to sex workers in Sonagachi. The intentionality of this nontranslation is not legible to most viewing the film. It is not intended to be.

Zana Briski worries on screen that she is not competent to intercede. However, in her frequent selection of scenes of parents absent, drugged, absorbed in their work, "hookers and fathers who think nothing of selling their daughters into the profession," Briski's performance of competence is made all the more evident, gilded by her own de-eroticization.[41] As she meets with administrators of what are often missionary boarding schools, she explains, "I am trying to get them out of there." She rolls her eyes and shakes her head, "Trying to find a school for them." The Christian whiteness of a number of the school administrators she approaches reiterates that non-Christians, people of color, and nonnormative sexual communities, are less competent parents, and that white people are clearly the ones who act to "save the children" through removal from their families or perhaps from Indians in general. The Christian subtext was not lost on professional film reviewers or those on Amazon.com. Zana Briski has "the patience of Job" and personifies Jesus.[42] And the *Washington Post*'s critic adds, "Heroism can come in subtle forms. This is one of them."[43] In a rare critique, the *Arizona Republic*'s film critic described the film as "divested of any social, historical or even factual context," a film whose "story becomes sentimental, a kind of cultural tourism" that focuses on the exploits of a "wealthy woman from the developed world."[44]

Born into Brothels is consistent with decades of U.S. domestic policy that shifts social responsibility from government to private hands. In that way, individual "sanctified philanthropists" can be asked to "substitute intentional goodwill for the nation-state's commitment" (Berlant 1997, 7).

Removal and Assimilation: Supplying Education

Scene: A boy talented in art looks at the camera: "My mother used to say jokingly, 'I am going to send you to London to study.' We don't have money to live let alone for studies." The camera shifts to a series of his photographs,

which end in a self-portrait, his head in profile, the shot remaining blurry while the red light district is in sharp focus. Scene shift: a bus carrying Briski and the excited children pulls away from the red light district, the scenery changing from congested urban streets to the lush green of ponds and palm trees. On the bus, the children eat and nap. Scene shift: the children are exultant, running into the waves of the sea. They play in the tide and on sand, looking out on the sudden light expanse of water, beach, and sky under sun and a pale daytime moon. As they shoot pictures of each other and their surroundings, the film shows us the photographs they have composed—alluring, playful, enraptured with the natural surroundings. These scenes make the lanes and dark rooms of the red light district appear more suffocating and "impure" upon return.

The use of darkness and light in the film shows up in the language of the Amazon.com reviews in disturbing frequency. The children are portrayed as seeing into "the darkest shadows of life" and facing "eventual dark lives."[45] These statements hauntingly replicate the language of British, Victorian, white women bent on leading their selected imperial wards—women and children of color—out of prostitution and "into a position of greater freedom and light, which will enable them to fight their own battles" (Butler, quoted in Burton 1992, 144). Consistent with this, the children's trip to the seashore under the care of Zana Briski displays a sudden expansive and naturalized horizon of light, wind, and tide in which the children are displayed as at once fully childlike, inventive, joyous, and innocently adventuresome.[46] A number of Amazon.com reviewers described the white woman Zana Briski's care as akin to the "pure light of love" contrasting with the brown children being "pulled back into the darkness."[47] The contrast of darkness and light carries both a racialized and erotophobic charge, where children are viewed as the victims of their culture, community, and nation of color (Narayan 1997).

Briski's presentation of the children as uneducated is contradictory. At times she confers with white, Christian nuns who agree that the children are not in school, because "nobody'll take them. Who will take them?" Yet we see one child in school uniform, another who is being pressed by his grandmother to study for upcoming exams, and adults listing a number of the children as fourth-grade level.[48] Some can write, not only in Bengali but in English. This contradiction is never sorted out. Briski repeatedly makes the case that they must be removed.

Consistent with the expectation that the rehabilitation of children requires submersion in an institution with minimal contact with their fami-

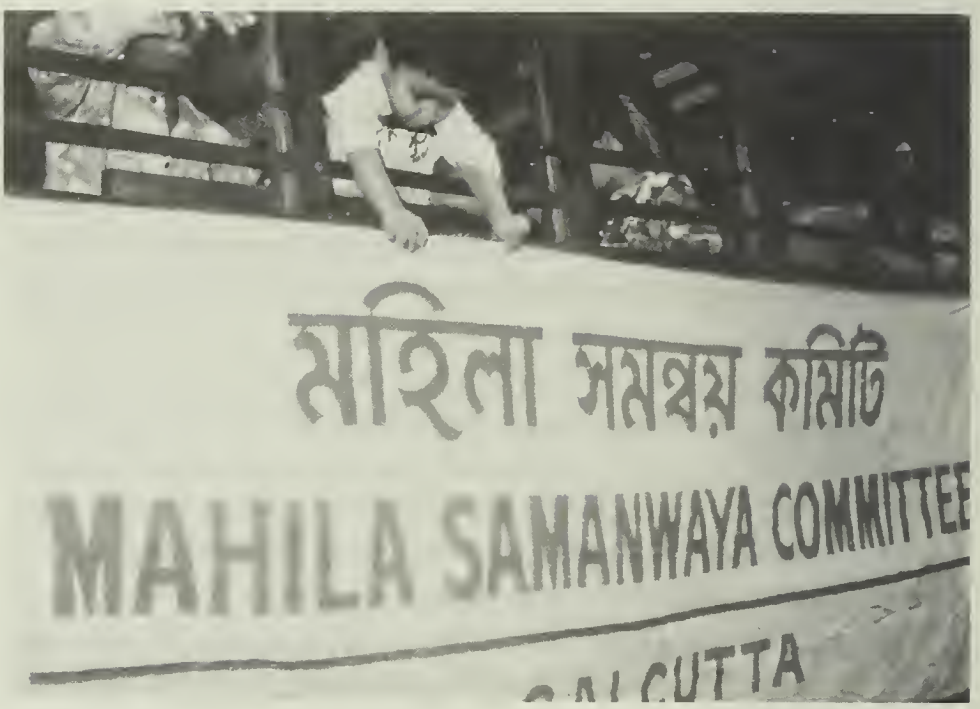
lies, a white, male school administrator lectures above the heads of three worried mothers that prescribed vacations will be identified, but that a death in the family, birthday, or wedding is not sufficient cause to justify leaves of absence for the children, denying them access to the events that cement kinship ties. He offers them what he contrastingly terms "a normal life." Not long after, Briski adds her voice to persuade an ambivalent child, "Isn't it better to be with good people that care about you and want to teach you well?"[49]

In the film, sex workers seem to exist only in Sonagachi, unable to move beyond the family's room or the alleys where they work, except to look over boarding schools before they return to their place. Sex workers who are mothers cannot join their children in the glare of television cameras that will greet them at the well-heeled Oxford Bookstore and Gallery, where an intensely serious journalist will echo Briski's use of photographic media for "one single purpose, a decent education for the children and hopefully a chance to know a world outside the red light district." When Briski decides to show the children's photographs at a Kolkata gallery so that the children can attend, it shows us an implicit moment of rupture that Briski's discourse sets up. The children and their mothers are invited to attend, but only the children come; the mothers are cooking and taking care of their other children. Briski's narrative emphasizes the contradiction where women can and cannot be mothers and sex workers simultaneously. Briski's contradictory relationship with the children's mothers is at its most obvious here. She wants to include them and speaks periodically about how close she feels to them. Yet, at the same time, she wants to remove their children from them. Sex workers have addressed this contradiction.

Resisting "Rehabilitation"

As Svati P. Shah has suggested, "The prospect of portraying Sonagachi as a red light district with no active non-governmental organizations (NGOs), no history of activism regarding HIV/AIDS and trafficking, and no relationship with local authorities is incredible" (2005). Indeed, sex-worker activists have made steady use of self-published websites as a means of representation, attempting to counter and respond to dominant rescue narratives such as that found in documentaries like *Born into Brothels*. In interesting contrast to the film's portrayal of sex-worker mothers unable to appear at media events, members of Durbar grant interviews and regularly take up standpoints in the public eye.[50]

Organizations such as the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee have



9.3. The children of sex workers going on an outing organized by Durbar, as one child reaches for the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee banner. Courtesy of Mrinal Kanti Dutta of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

been highly critical of the assumed need for rehabilitation, objecting to being "targets of moralizing impulses of dominant social groups, through missions of cleansing and sanitizing."[51] They also register objections to having their children subjected to similar attempts at assimilation. Contrary to Briski's implied generalization, the sex workers of Durbar headquartered in Sonagachi present themselves as actively seeking better education for their children.

Durbar would agree with Briski that the children of sex workers have difficulty being welcomed in schools, but would add that sex workers have learned to draw on a number of techniques to overcome these barriers. On a summer day in Sonagachi, I asked to enter the single-room family home of a woman dressed as an ordinary housewife, with a streak of red powder in her parted hair and a red bindi on her forehead. The silver and white bangles on her arm, symbolizing married status, clink quietly as she speaks. She dresses this way to accompany her son to and from school, disguising her profession to protect him. Moving outside the red light district, she risks not only his but her own safety if she does not dress this way. "When they see us, they say amongst themselves, 'See that woman? She does this kind of job. She lives in that house.' If I am waiting at a bus stop, because of who I am, they push

me because there is nothing to pushing a whore. If we protest, they say, 'Oh, are you a respectable wife?'" She worries about her son's treatment at the hands of others: "Yes, when people see my son, they say, 'Whore's son!' But your child is also born the same way, after the same process. Children are children. If you hold my child, do you become unclean and if I hold yours am I supposed to feel grateful? I feel very hurt when they say 'whore's son.'" She takes him to school and brings him home in full housewifely regalia: "He spends all day after school with me." She looks over at him as he watches a small television in the well-lit room that includes a small fridge and a neatly made bed. She explains that she leaves him with a childcare provider when she works. She continues, "I cannot bear to eat well and think he isn't getting anything nice because who knows what he'll get there? So he eats with me . . . then I drop him off at the lady's place. She takes care of him. I'm doing my work for him, so I should feed him well."

This mother's approach to managing the social stigma of being a sex worker is dressing in housewifely drag, keeping him with her as much as possible, and paying for childcare when she is working to support him. The Kolkata-based nongovernmental organization Sanlaap, which Briski briefly included in the film, argues that the children should be accepted despite the occupation of their mothers. They suggest that children be seen as innocent, while remaining critical of sex work. In contrast, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, omitted from the film, argues that the children of sex workers will continue to carry a stigma as long as sex work does. Therefore, they actively work to remove the stigma associated with sex work, work for labor rights, and advise that communities "mainstream the children within the local school system rather than sending them away to residential homes."[52] When teachers in the local schools told the children that their mothers were doing bad work, and that they should work hard to "take their mothers out of the place," Durbar interceded, asking, "Do we do this to other children?"[53] Durbar has worked to close the divide between the red light district and the "outside" world by encouraging teachers and members of other "respectable" institutions to dialogue and interact with sex workers, seeking acceptance as human, multifaceted people.

Durbar is intent on addressing a high drop-out rate among the children of sex workers, which they attribute to the expense of school and fluctuating income, crowded living situations that do not easily allow studying, scheduling conflicts between daytime school and parental night shifts, and a lack of adults to help with homework. In my interviews in and about red light districts, however, sex workers said that education remains difficult mainly

because of the stigma and discrimination the children of sex workers face in school and wider society.

Sex-worker activists like those in Durbar make the case, as do so many sex-worker organizations, that the way labor is structured in some occupations, especially those that take a toll on workers and their families, can and should change, without outlawing the occupation itself. Durbar asks, "If other workers in similarly exploitative occupations can work within the structures of their profession to improve their working conditions, why can not sex workers remain in the sex industry and demand a better deal in their life and work?"[54]

Conclusion

Scene: closing dedication: "In honor of the women and children of the red light district." Roll credits. Final scene: Briski, hand in hand with four children, appears to walk out of the red light district into the daylight.

Documentaries offering "the iconography of victim" and the "benevolence of charity" curiously mix connectedness and stigmatizing difference (Nichols 1991, 234). This is precisely how an Indian British woman deeply engaged with the film. "This is not a perfect documentary in any sense of the word," she writes, "but is in fact a snapshot into a world most of us will never venture into because we are very lucky here in the West, we are not born into brothels, we are not Calcutta's red light kids and most of all we are not destined [to] 'walk the line' as fallen women whose legacy for their children is tragic as it is sordid." She writes, using the pseudonym "Kali," the major Hindu goddess of the city of Kolkata, in which Sonagachi resides, that she "experienced Asia" in the film. Simultaneously she experienced a reinforcement of distance with her unconsciously erotophobic, classed, and ethnocentric response of "we are very lucky here in the West." Sex workers and their children apparently are other people in other places.

Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein (this volume) state that desire is "actively incited and sustained by media in conjunction with other social institutions such as the state, structures of family and kinship, and demands of labor and capital." The rescue narrative in the documentary *Born into Brothels* resonates with the desires and fears currently active in the United States, desires and fears surrounding a number of contested questions and social institutions. The popularity and plentitude of constructions of Asia in the imagination of the global North, constructions of hyper-erotic red light districts, make these sites appear emblematic of nations and regions. Spectators in the United States view *Born into Brothels*' nighttime scenes in the

alleys of Sonagachi, a marketplace filled with ready and available bodies. The image of Asia as a market where seemingly everything is for sale may be a part of an intensifying U.S. anxiety about the viability of American political and economic dominance in a postcolonial world, where some prior colonies are becoming huge emerging markets with highly competitive production capabilities. The images of markets may haunt U.S. middle- and working-class viewers as they see Asia as a location for outsourcing what were once stable, living-wage blue- and white-collar jobs in the United States. This is a locus of desire and fear.

The spectators' understanding of *Born into Brothels* contributes to constituting a mediated and entwined erotics and anti-erotics of Asia. The red light district of working mothers and the fear for brown children trafficked into sex work function relationally for a consuming Orientalist gaze toward mothers and children as objects of intrigue, desire, disavowed titillation, and horror. This resonates with and through a moralizing fundamentalism, particularly exemplified in the antitrafficking discourse of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and the global gag rule, which states that organizations receiving U.S. government funds must take a loyalty oath against "prostitution."

As seen through the interpretations of reviewers in major U.S. newspapers and on Amazon.com, *Born into Brothels* presents an eroticized location where spectators can view parents of color as sexually deviant. As such, their children, presumed to be on their way to neglect or abuse, require white intervention. There is a substantial and tragic history of North American whites' removing children from African American and Native American families.[55] Current interest in the United States in adopting children from countries (and parents) in the global South is sometimes justified by perceptions that children seem to be without (proper) family. This familiar rhetoric was used by elite Indian women who founded a Kolkata rescue home in the 1930s for young female prostitutes "deprived of all of their kith and kin," requiring "someone who cares" (Sinha 2006, quoted in Dell 1990, 207). With the current high profile of American debates to expand legal and cultural definitions of what constitutes proper family (same-sex marriage, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer adoption and foster care) and challenges to erotophobic, fundamentalist Christianity's normative heterosexuality, it makes sense that Briski's film resonates with questions of whether another sexual minority such as sex workers should be designated as fit to head families and raise children (Buti 2004; Kendell 2003; Roberts 1991). The apparent need for removal and assimilation in the film produces

afresh a longtime and ongoing response to taking children away from communities of color and intervention to keep children away from queer families. These actions often have more in common with U.S. interest in adopting children from the global South than is realized.

European and American interventions into what have become nations of the global South were and are "understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'" (Spivak 2008, 297). Scholars have shown that some white women also actively took up a "white woman's burden" in the name of pursuing their own share of imperial rule and thereby some women's rights. In contrast, *Born into Brothels* and charitable organizations such as PhotoVoice suggest that the worthy recipients left in the global South are brown children who must be saved from brown adults and brown nations by white people, through educational assimilation, if not adoption. As they historically have been stereotyped in the United States, brown women overseas seem to have become less infantilized and more culpable as bad mothers and sexual deviants. In the documentary, the work of a white Euroamerican in concert with largely Christian, white boarding school administrators offers a location of rehabilitation and assimilation of Asia's next generation.

Documentaries are realist narratives, promising "to tell us what really happens" and how things really are (Nead 1988, 140). Kenneth Turan, of the *Los Angeles Times*, writes that "the draw of this irresistible film" can be considered by quoting one of the children who looks at a photograph of a veiled woman. He contends, "Though it is hard to face, we must look at it. Because it's the truth."[56] "Truths" like the pictured, veiled, Middle Eastern woman and the Asian "prostitutes" of the film are often standard images that include widely accepted, carefully framed interpretations and exclude others. They become believable in the capturing of particular locations, such as the brothel, that is, and yet seemingly cannot be, considered a home, and in capturing the character of a sex worker who is simultaneously, yet apparently cannot be, considered an appropriate mother. Sex work and sex-work communities are restigmatized by "literally *being seen* as a red light zone" and "the proliferation of visual representations of the district and, by extension, of 'prostitution' itself" (Shah 2006, 287). This particular kind of repeated voyeurism produces a consumable Asia and underwrites the contradiction of the spectators' engagement and differentiation.

Yet, "prevailing conceptions of Asia" as "an eroticized space formed through desires and anxieties embedded in 'the Western gaze'" are being challenged by Asian media as well as a global sex-worker community

9.4. The Durbar president in 2001, Putul Singh, provides an interview on trafficking and self-regulatory boards to the press at the Academy of Fine Arts, in Kolkata. Courtesy of Mrinal Kanti Dutta of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee.

(Mankekar and Schein, this volume). The counternarrative of sex-worker rights is less familiar than the dominant language or image of concern, judgment, and rescue in much of the media. Through the media of websites and listservs, however, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee represents itself as one of dozens of sex-worker activist organizations around Asia at work in coalition with and across communities. These organizations seek to subject standard contradictions of connection and rescue to their own gaze and critique, complicating "any reductive understanding of Asians as always-already victims of an objectifying Western gaze" (Mankekar and Schein, this volume). They argue to overcome distancing between their family homes, local day schools, governments, and wider audiences. They see a need for greater erotic, business, family, and community self-determination as well as collective work through a network of fellow human beings in the wider world. Their voices are more likely to be available through websites and occasional academic journal articles, rather than mainstream entertainment like *Born into Brothels* or PhotoVoice.

Notes

The title of this chapter, of course, draws on the work of Chandra Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes." I thank the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (Unstoppable Women's Coordination Committee), the Indian sex-worker activist organization fight-

ing for workers' rights. I thank them for educating me, sharing their insights and experience. I thank Indrani Sinha, of Sanlaap, for generously providing her knowledge. Kajori Dutta Ray's exceptionally thoughtful interviewing and translations, along with her ability to think beyond stereotypes, were such gifts, for which I thank her. Aloka Mitra's Women's Interlink Foundation provided important research capabilities. I also thank the social workers of the Society for Community Development for their kindness and insight. My warm thanks to Suzanne Cherrin for her support and advice. Bonnie Mayo's editing and intellectual acumen made this chapter a far better piece, for which I am grateful. Finally, my abiding love and appreciation for the political affirmation and editorial expertise provided by Pat Langley.

1. This clip is available through YouTube. It had received nearly 13,000 hits by February 19, 2008, with a rating of four out of five stars.

2. Film synopsis, *Born into Brothels*, accessed December 30, 2007, http://www.hbo.com/docs/programs/born_into_brothels/synopsis.html.

3. The numbers of sex workers are notoriously difficult to calculate. However, see All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health's (1992) report.

4. My sample of newspaper film reviews was constructed by selecting two newspaper reviews from each region of the country, from newspapers with a circulation of over 300,000 found on the film-review website rottentomatoes.com. However, only one newspaper in the southeast qualified, the *Miami Herald*. The remainder by region are the *Dallas Morning News*, *Arizona Republic* (Southwest), *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times* (West), *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* (Midwest), *Washington Post*, and *New York Times* (Northeast). My sample of eleven self-selected reviewers on the Amazon.com website was constructed of all reviews that had been read by a minimum of ten people, with 50 percent or more finding the review useful. Both websites were accessed on or around January 1, 2008.

5. Chris Vognar, "Review of *Born into Brothels*," *Dallas Morning News*, February 25, 2005.

6. Marjorie Baumgarten, review of *Born into Brothels*, *Austin Chronicle*, March 18, 2005.

7. For more on the so-called Prostitution Loyalty Oath, which one might preface with "anti-," see Larry Rohter's article "Prostitution Puts U.S. and Brazil at Odds on AIDS Policy," *New York Times*, July 24, 2005; William Fisher, "Global Gag: USAID Sued for Impeding Foreign Family Planning, AIDS/HIV Funding with 'Anti-Prostitution Policy,'" *Common Dreams*, August 24, 2005, accessed February 26, 2008, http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0824-05.htm; and United States Agency for International Development 2005. For context on the Bush Global Gag Rule on defunding those organizations that provide full reproductive health services and HIV/AIDS services, see Planned Parenthood Federation of America, "The Bush Administration, the Global Gag Rule, and HIV/AIDS Funding," June 2003, accessed June 19, 2012, http://web.archive.org/web/20041217234742/http://www.plannedparenthood.org/library/AIDS/030702_AIDS_report.pdf. For a critically important site on sex-worker activism against such issues, see http://www.nswp.org.

8. For a sex-workers researcher's critique of this, see Chapkis's (2003) study.

9. For government documents, policy analysis, and updates on court challenges, see the Prostitutes' Educational Network at http://www.bayswan.org/gagorder/mainpage_gag.html and the Center for Health and Gender Equity at http://www.genderhealth.org/the_issues/us_foreign_policy/antiprostitution_pledge/.

10. As further encouragement for such narratives, George W. Bush's speech to the United Nations in 2003 drew on the hoary language of the Victorian yellow press that printed vulgar, sensational stories for their readers. His speech had "widespread reverberations in the journalistic field," including coverage from the influential *New York Times* and *New York Times Magazine* (Soderlund 2005, 77).

11. For the United States, India is "the world's biggest democracy," according to *Time*, and possibly the "next great superpower," which requires Americans to quickly learn "how to ride the elephant" in order to maintain the current hierarchies of nations (Green 2006, 46, cover). *Time*'s cover of June 26, 2006, offers the erotics of a mediated Asia with a richly bejeweled Indian woman, a call-bank telephone operator whose provocative sidelong glance suggests she is ready to serve.

12. These include not simply twenty-four-hour call-center work or data processing, but also white-collar labor, including radiology, software development, and paralegal work.

13. These aesthetic choices of exotic, evening streets are the very same vision that appears in *Time*'s stills of "brash, messy and sexy" Bombay (now Mumbai) and the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (Perry 2006, 40).

14. See also Daniel Chandler, "Notes on 'The Gaze,'" accessed February 1, 2008, http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/gaze/gaze.html.

15. Anne Allison's use of the term "distant intimacy" somewhat parallels the documentary's mediation (this volume).

16. Quoted in Chandler, "Notes on 'The Gaze.'"

17. The quote in the subheading is a television caption used by the Hindi-English cable station StarNews in coverage of the children's photography show in Kolkata's Oxford Gallery. News clip included in the film.

18. Mirareviews, "The Lives, Hope, & Creativity of Calcutta's Lowly Children," Amazon.com review, July 22, 2005, accessed January 3, 2010, http://www.amazon.com.

19. Lawyeraau, "A Photo Opportunity . . . ," Amazon.com review, November 26, 2005, accessed January 3, 2010, http://www.amazon.com. While I will not explore it in this chapter, the construction of art as transformation, as overcoming one's roots or experiences, at times can have a decidedly classist (or ethnocentric) sense to it. "The transformative power of art," which is one of the promotional lines for the film and a section in the Amnesty International Companion Curriculum guide, implies that mediating capabilities of photographic art and filmmaking stand in stark contrast to the assumed damage done by the sex-for-money scenario of commercial sex work. It would be worth unpacking this judgment, the shades of aristocratic amateurism. There is an elitist sense of art's being nothing one does for money, nor something that could be working class. This classism in the guise of sympathy is evident in *Born into Brothels* reviews as well as in the regrettably paternalistic prose of Arjun Appadurai's "Global Ethnoscapes."

20. Zinta Aistars, "That There Might Be Witness: Through the Eyes of Children," Amazon.com review, September 23, 2006, accessed January 3, 2010, http://www.amazon.com.

21. Mirareviews, Aistars, and Lawyeraau, Amazon.com reviews.

22. Eric Wilson, "Torn Up and Touched," Amazon.com review, April 13, 2005, accessed January 3, 2010, http://www.amazon.com; Aistars, Amazon.com review.

23. Carla Meyer, "Review of *Born into Brothels*," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 4, 2005.

24. This growing critical awareness under the care of a white woman is consistent with Chandra Mohanty's argument that Third World women are often seen as lacking agency unless Westernized or, indeed, acted for by Western intervention (Mohanty 1991). Coinciding with this, Kamala Kempadoo (2005) convincingly argues that sex-worker communities, particularly those of color in the global South, are some of the last to be recognized by non–sex workers as exercising agency.

25. I use the lowercase to refer to the generic term, rather than the organization PhotoVoice. Griffiths's quote is on the PhotoVoice website, accessed February 1, 2008, http://www.photovoice.org.

26. Accessed February 1, 2008, http://www.photovoice.org/html/galleryshop/.

27. Statement by Steve McCurry, National Geographic photographer, accessed February 1, 2008, http://www.photovoice.org/html/exhibitionsandevents/.

28. Accessed February 1, 2008, http://www.photovoice.org/html/projects/forumprojects/outoffocus.html.

29. Richard Nilsen, "Review of *Born into Brothels*," *Arizona Republic*, March 11, 2005.

30. There are many invaluable studies of sex work as labor that do not reduce it to sexual assault. See especially Kempadoo's (2005) study.

31. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, *Sex Workers' Manifesto*, 1997, accessed June 15, 2012, http://www.nswp.org/resource/sex-workers-manifesto-first-national-conference-sex-workers-india.

32. Durbar got its start from funding that arrived in red light districts for HIV-prevention education in the early 1990s. Through a collaboration between a doctor and members of the sex-worker community called the Sonagachi Project, they established clinics and an extensive peer-education system in which sex worker educators visit sex workers in over thirty red light districts. Dr. Jana and the sex-worker activists realized that they would have little impact on keeping rates of HIV and other STDs low if sex workers did not respect and value their own survival enough to advocate with customers for safer sex. As it stands, thanks in very large part to this collaboration, Kolkata's red light districts have impressively low HIV rates. Durbar's work has been so impressive, regardless of its relative lack of coverage beyond medical circles, that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has funded replicating Durbar's methods in six other Indian states. Peer educators founded Durbar and have since taken over the running of the clinics and preventative education, as well as advocating for full decriminalization and rights for sex workers and their children. Durbar is an organization that includes sex workers and the children of sex workers.

33. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, *Sex Workers' Manifesto*, 1997, accessed June 15, 2012, http://www.nswp.org/resource/sex-workers-manifesto-first-national-conference-sex-workers-india.

34. Nilsen, "Review of *Born into Brothels*."

35. U.S. spectators realize, for example, gay men are still represented as child molesters, such that some states ban adoption or foster care. Lesbian mothers are still constructed as sexually corrupting or insufficient role models who, in child custody cases, are sometimes forced to choose between living with their lovers or their children. These stereotypes of sexual minorities—that cut across heterosexism and sexual normativity—say more about the desiring imaginations of those who believe them than those they are applied to. The breakdown of boundaries in the mainstream projected onto particular groups points to the dominant fascination of children as objects of erotic interest. It is worth considering how these stereotypes contribute to upholding patriarchal privilege, in line with seeking younger and younger females for "clean" sex in the age of AIDS and the maintenance of unequal gender relations in a world where adult women no longer "know their place."

36. Baumgarten, review of *Born into Brothels*.

37. There are a least three major economic arrangements: indebtedness in which only tips are kept by the worker, a 50 percent split between worker and brothel manager, and daily rent. For more information on this, see the work of Dell (1999) and Sleighthome and Sinha (1997).

38. Philippa Levine suggests, "Prostitution became a symbol of considerable significance in the condemnation of societies regarded as immoral or amoral, unconcerned with brutalizing women. Colonial men's indifference to the shame of their womenfolk became an index of male brutality, and the unquestioned acceptance of prostitution a mark of coarse and unfeeling societies" (2004, 160). The bestselling, sensationalist book *Mother India*, by the American author Katherine Mayo, was just such an argument, constituting an India in the Western imagination as a place that subjected its innocent to degradation and perversity. If Mother India could not protect her own, then, Mayo suggested, proper imperial custody would have to remain in place. Indians had been fighting for self-rule for many decades and would obtain national independence just short of two decades after Mayo's apology for colonial rule was published (see Sinha 2006).

39. Wilson, Amazon.com review.

40. Briski's filmic presence of minimal makeup and a lack of emphasized, erotic, "feminine" allure is so pronounced that viewing her self-presentation at the Academy Awards, including full makeup and low-cut evening gown, with a man beside her, is surprising.

41. Desson Thomson, "Review of *Born into Brothels*," *Washington Post*, February 18, 2005.

42. Baumgarten, review of *Born into Brothels*; Wilson, Amazon.com review.

43. Thomson, "Review of *Born into Brothels*."

44. Nilsen, "Review of *Born into Brothels*."

45. Aistars, Amazon.com review; Wilson, Amazon.com review.

46. This scene is available near the end of a clip posted on YouTube. As of February 19, 2008, the clip had received over 4,500 hits, with a rating of four of five stars.

47. Paul Galioni, "A Film I'll Remember My Entire Life," Amazon.com review, September 28, 2005, accessed January 3, 2010, http://www.amazon.com; Aistars, Amazon .com review.

48. The scene of the grandmother pressing for her grandson to study for exams is available at YouTube. As of February 19, 2008, the clip had been viewed 3,461 times, with a rating of four out of five stars.

49. The scenes of the school administrator speaking to the mothers and the boy being asked if he wants to study with "good people" are available at YouTube. As of February 19, 2008, the clip containing both scenes had been viewed 3,461 times, with a rating of four out of five stars.

50. The Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee has posted quite a number of documents electronically. They are continuing to address one of their earliest goals of breaking down the presumed divisions between the sex-worker communities and non–sex workers, using an annual conference, petitions, protests, letters to newspapers, and other media-worthy actions.

51. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, *Sex Workers' Manifesto*, 2.

52. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, "Towards an Indian Pedagogy of the Oppressed," accessed December 20, 2010, http://www.durbar.org/programs/education .html, page 2.

53. Ibid., 3.

54. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, *Sex Workers' Manifesto*, 3.

55. On Wednesday, February 13, 2008, the Australian prime minister offered a formal apology to Australian aboriginal peoples for past mistreatment (see Kevin Rudd, "Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples," http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples). The forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and the breaking up of their families was central to acknowledging pain, suffering, and loss. Canada offered a similar apology for the mistreatment of indigenous peoples in 1998 (see CBC News, "Australia Offers Landmark Apology to Aboriginal People," February 12, 2008). The United States has yet to make a similar apology.

56. Kenneth Turan, "Review of *Born into Brothels*," *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 2005.

AMERICAN GEISHAS AND ORIENTAL/IST FANTASIES

Arrayed in the brilliant colors of exoticism and exuding a full-blown yet uncertain sensuality, the Orient, where unfathomable mysteries dwell and cruel and barbaric scenes are staged, has fascinated and disturbed Europe for a long time. It has been its glittering imaginary but also its mirage.

—MALEK ALLOULA, *THE COLONIAL HAREM*, 1986

I loved *Memoirs of a Geisha*. It felt like taking a trip to a far-away exotic place: a place of great beauty and mystery but one remarkably savage as well. I never knew much about the Orient but this book taught me a lot. *Memoirs* is an authentic fiction; it all rings true.

—POSTING ON AMAZON.COM, 1999

Upon release in October 1997, a fictional memoir of a Japanese geisha, penned by an American man, became a sensational hit in the United States. The target of a mass media blitz—everything from *Newsweek* and *People* to NPR and morning TV—*Memoirs of a Geisha* captured the popular imagination: a favorite of reading groups across the country, on the *New York Times* bestseller list for fifty-eight straight weeks, and picked up by Spielberg for cinematic release (which, eventually taken over by Rob Marshall, came out in 2005).[1] Recording the rags-to-riches story of a poor fisherman's daughter transformed into Kyoto's most famous geisha in the interwar period, *Memoirs* was praised for its exotic setting, compelling character depiction, and riveting storytelling. And, even more striking to me—a scholar of Japan who has never found Americans to be particularly curious or knowledgeable about this East Asian country—was the rapture with which fans spoke

to me about the place they had been transported to in reading the book. Some called this place Japan, others the Orient, and still others a generic Far East. But no matter what name it was given, common was the sense of being taken away to a faraway place that, both arousing and exciting, was also deeply pleasurable for the knowledge readers felt they had attained in the course of the journey.

Intrigued but unsettled by this popular interest in a tale set in what was taken to be (more or less) Japan, and in exploring foreignness through a novel regarded as both entertaining and "authentic," I began to question whether, or in what sense, the *Memoirs* fad was Orientalist. Recalling Edward Said's (1979) famous formulation, Orientalism is viewing different cultures through an us-they divide that essentializes and exoticizes them as "other"—a mere alterity of the self. Certainly, *Memoirs* was a story crafted around cultural difference that both played up and luxuriated in exotic otherness. Written by an American and for Americans (though it soon became a global hit), *Memoirs* was set in a Japan of the past and in a community (geishas) long steeped in mystery and secrecy. The depiction of this world was at once othering and intimate. Readers were shocked, if titillated, by the violence and savagery of the book, but also seduced by the beauty and delicacy of a different cultural aesthetics.[2] As I was continually told by fans, *Memoirs* was a mesmerizing read akin to taking a trip to an exotic land savored for its difference.

For Said, Orientalism is a mindset that congeals around a place he calls "the Orient." Speaking of how Europeans envisioned the Middle East at a time when they were colonizing the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Said argued that Orientalism depends on a strategy of positional superiority that "puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (1979, 7). While one may become intimate with the foreignness of the Orient, the Orientalist also remains outside and in control. Orientalism is thus premised on both exteriority and authority: traveling to a place (the Orient) whose secrets and intricacies one discovers from the position of outsider. Power—either real or imagined—is always at work in Orientalism in that forays into foreign lands are taken with the mind of keeping one's own borders and sense of superiority intact. Even in encountering cultural difference, then, the encounter is done in a manner that confirms, rather than alters, one's own world and position in it. What is seen and known of different places is selective, driven by the need and desire to reassert one's own cultural identity as both superior and secure. "Orientalism" is the name

given this enterprise: what John Treat has called "the Western study of everywhere else" (1999, ix).

The U.S. craze of *Memoirs* took place on the eve of the new millennium. This was a time when the news of Japan's bubble economy had long since faded, along with the anxieties that Japan was invading the soul of U.S. culture (fed by such events as Sony's purchase of Columbia Studios in 1989). By the late 1990s, Japan was no longer being regarded as either an economic threat or an industrial-educational model for Americans to emulate. Economically, its status as the leading East Asian power was being taken over by China, with whom U.S. investments had risen astronomically. As a dependent and ally of the United States, Japan was registering little immediate, geopolitical concern and was far less in the news than, say, North Korea or China. Overall, Japan had slipped in the daily consciousness of Americans in all but one arena, popular culture. By the late 1990s, Japanese goods and lifestyle trends had proliferated across the United States (as well as the globe). Through the mallification of *dojo*s and sushi bars, and the fads of *Pokémon* and *Hello Kitty*, Japanese pop culture was becoming rooted in the daily habitus of millions of Americans. In the medium of everyday consumer habits, what originated from Japan started losing its moniker as foreign, and getting adopted as domestic and routine. In general, then, Japan was regarded less as a threat, a model of superiority, or foreign "other" than as a military ally and consumer brand by most Americans in the atmosphere of the late twentieth century. None of this would seem to be the breeding ground for the sentiments and power dynamics undergirding Orientalism. What then can we make of *Memoirs*' popular appeal in late 1990s America of a book about an Oriental Japan, staged as the life-history of the iconically exotic geisha, and written from the perspective of a Western authority?

This is the issue I take up in this chapter. In the craze surrounding Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* in the United States in the late 1990s, what were the desires aroused, how were these spurred by the construction of an oriental Japan, and in what sense (and what sense not) can the *Memoirs* fad be considered Orientalist? Without a doubt, the popularity of this novel had much to do with the world it evoked. But it wasn't only the world itself—what I call here Oriental Japan—but also the ways in which this was textually rendered through the literary devices and imaginative strategies (what I examine here as the book's realness, story, and Oriental erotics) of an American novelist writing in the first-person voice of a foreign and female geisha. As Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein lay out in the introduction to this

volume, attachment to place is deeply eroticized and heavily shaped by the apparatuses and circulation of mass media today. As they also note, such mediated erotics are rarely politically benign. Rather, imbricated as they often are with power, desires are mapped onto lineaments of the political, social, ethnic, nation (and transnation) and get variously played out (bred, remapped, contested) in the domain of popular culture produced by mass media today.

In the case of *Memoirs*, the medium involved, the written novel, is certainly older than many of the new media dealt with in this volume—cell phones, Internet, video production—whose "potential to create or enable new forms of subjectification as well as linkages and communities across great distances" (Mankekar and Schein, this volume) is tied to technological innovation. But if e-mail messages and cell phones foster the linkage of conversation across distance, a novel like *Memoirs* links readers to the intricacies of a distant world made imaginable through storytelling. Virtual travel is at work in both, and both could be to said to engage a form of transnational imagination. I agree with Arjun Appadurai (1996) here that while the imagination has always been important in suturing attachments to place, community, and selfhood, its role is particularly intense in this postindustrial age of heightened migrations, media production, and identity-flux. This is not to say, however, that all kinds of virtual travel or mediated attachments are the same. In Schein's study of Hmong video traffic (this volume), it is the Hmong's dislocation from home that drives a "homeland desire" among diasporic Hmong in the United States. By contrast, in the U.S.-based *Memoirs* craze, the fantasy gestures in the opposite direction: toward a foreign location that flames desires for exotic escape rather than for homely (re)connection. In both cases, a form of border crossing is imaginatively rendered and, through this, an erotics of attachment aroused. But whereas the former (the dislocation from "home") would seem more obviously tied to the current conditions of transnational migrations and structural adjustment wrought by global neoliberalism, what can we say of the latter—the desire for escape into an imaginary Orient for stay-at-home Americans?

As the medium of the novel is older, so too would seem the formulations of nationhood and citizenship embedding the Oriental desires at play in *Memoirs*. Driven not by distance or displacement from home, but by the comfort or confirmation of American hegemony, the flight into an exotic Orient is both luxurious and safe. Scripted for American tastes, it muddies but never threatens the borders of "Occidental" identity. In this sense, *Memoirs* is an Orientalist text that, set in a Japan evacuated of its contempo-

rary history and remade into an anachronistic Orient, triggers what Renato Rosaldo (1989) has called "imperialist nostalgia." And yet, counter to Said, the so-called Orientalists here (the American fans) are engaged in a fantasy creation far less clearly tied to (military or political-economic) domination. Deconstructing this dynamic—of an Orientalist fantasy distanced from an overt, or immediate, imperialist agenda—is what I am interested in here. The *Memoirs* fad is best understood as a fantasy that plays with masks: a novel that masks as history, an author who masks as a professor, a geisha who masks as being like (but also not) a spunky Westerner driven by love and the desire to make her own choices. *Memoirs* is made to feel both familiar and exotic, both authentic and deliciously staged—just like a geisha with all her artifice. And this erotic fantasy to learn about, escape into, and also try on (to imaginatively mimic as if donning a mask) is less based on power relations with a real Japan than projected onto an imaginary Orient. This projection is admittedly haunted by nostalgia for an East Asia stuck in the past whose exotica fits easier with an American sense of global superiority than, say, the economic prowess of twenty-first-century China or the electronic products of contemporary Japan. And in this the Oriental, Orientalist fantasy is distinctly American, beholden to a phantom other disguised as authentic and real.

My methodology in this chapter is, following Schein (this volume), "ethnotextual," combining textual analysis and ethnographic research. The latter was conducted mainly between 1999 and 2000 and consists of ten intensive interviews (all with white, Euroamerican women ranging in age from twenty-five to mid-seventies—the primary reading audience for *Memoirs*, according to its publisher, Random House); more casual (though often lengthy) conversations with around seventy men and women; and an examination of over three hundred entries on the *Memoirs* page on Amazon.com. Throughout, I explore the erotics of place in the book and fad by focusing particularly on the way *Memoirs* transported (U.S.) readers to a place that is both real and imaginary, providing what was taken to be knowledge about the Orient. Discovering patterns of what I will lay out as distant intimacy and erotic epistemology in the fantasies inspired by *Memoirs*, I probe the architectonics of media-place-erotics in three other texts that similarly record trips taken by Westerners to the Orient: Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantème* (written in the late 1800s), John Treat's *Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism, and Japan/Ideologies of Desire* (1999), and Alessandro Baricco's *Silk* (translated in 1996).

While all three are erotic tales involving Westerners set in the Orient, power is configured differently, returning us again to the issue of Oriental-

ism and its utility for making sense of mediated erotics that deploy the trope of the Orient in these postcolonial times of the twenty-first century.

Realness

On the cover of *Memoirs* is a full-page photo of a geisha and the words "a novel by Arthur Golden," printed below the title. Similarly, a motif of fans fills the title page, with "a novel by Arthur Golden" underneath the title. The mood evoked by these images is dreamy, and the name of the author is clearly inscribed. How interesting then that many readers missed the signs that this book is a novel, taking *Memoirs* to be the real story of a Japanese geisha, instead. As many told me, they were surprised to learn after reading the book that Sayuri was an imaginary character. And even those who knew from the beginning that Golden was the writer stressed the book's historical accuracy, something Golden paid attention to in his acknowledgments. Speaking of the research he conducted on geishas, Golden (1997, 433) presents himself as an authority on Japan. Indeed, details of the author's biography found on the book jacket—educated at Harvard in Japanese art and at Columbia, where he received a master's in Japanese history—were widely known by readers of the book.

Of course, what delighted fans in *Memoirs* was not simply the "authentic aura," as one person put it.[3] It was its "believability" coupled with an exciting story variously characterized as a "fairytale," "juicy memoir," and "pornographic Harlequin romance." While fans tended to forefront the latter, they also liked the book for what they learned historically about geishas and Japan. In the minds of those fans I interviewed and those logging on to Amazon.com, *Memoirs* was a book that doubled as both novel and historical text—what one fan called "a good authentic fiction." Taken to be a well-crafted novel, *Memoirs* was also taken to be fact. Thus, *Memoirs* was said to be both "110% accurate" and entertaining; Golden, a "true Japanologist" as well as a gifted writer; Sayuri, the "essence" of geisha culture and an "Asian Cinderella"; and the story, "pure entertainment" and also a "stunning revelation of a very foreign culture."

What drew American readers to this historical fantasy, and what role was played here by Japan—a place far more in the news today for its technology and economics than for the geisha community so anachronistic even in Japan itself at this point? The latter is intriguing precisely for its difference, of course. Indeed, fans repeatedly described this world as "exotic," "foreign," "forbidden," and "vanishing."[4] Yet what does it add to the fantasy that Golden's depiction has an "authentic aura"? Malek Alloula (1986) has

written of a similar dynamic in picture postcards of Algerian women, posed to be both sexually alluring and ethnographically authentic, taken by the French during their colonial control of Algeria in the twentieth century. As he observes, there is always a kernel of truth or verisimilitude in the pose. Without this "counterfeit realism," the "whole endeavor would degenerate into gratuitous fantasy" (Alloula 1986, 52). Models who came to the studio were dressed in local costume to stage portraits that were stylized as erotic stereotypes: "Moorish woman in housedress," "Reclining odalisque," "Moorish bust." As Alloula puts it, a truth in the details does not add up to a truthfulness of the whole.

In this case, what drove the quest for "truth" was a desire for control that, though elusive, is central to all colonialist endeavors. So much is unknown in dealing with a foreign culture that penetrating its inner mysteries is a fantasy that haunts all colonialism. What the picture postcards of Algerian women thus offered was a view of a revealed culture, a pacified land, a possessed body (Alloula 1986). What Alloula refers to as an "ethnographic alibi" can also be seen in the popular phenomenon of *Memoirs*: the insistence by so many fans that Golden's story reflected a world that is historically real. Operating here as well was the desire to know this exotic culture and its erotic female deeply. And fundamental to this erotics of epistemology (or epistemological erotics) was Golden's ability to establish an ethnographic alibi. That he was so successful is striking, given that few readers (at least among those I spoke with or whose reviews I read) had much, if any, previous knowledge about Japan or geishas with which to judge the book's accuracy. Thus, apart from the question of how "right" did Golden get it, the question is, what rhetorical strategies did he use to convince so many readers that the book absolutely "rings true"?

Following the title page and preceding the main text is a prelude. This is titled "Translator's Note" and signed by (the fictional) Jakob Haarhuis, Arnold Rusoff Professor of Japanese History, New York University. This note begins with Haarhuis's recalling the time when, aged fourteen, he first arrived in Japan and, along with his father, was the only Westerner attending a dance performance in Kyoto. Two memories stand out from this moment: how foreign he felt yet also how pleased that he could understand some of the Japanese being spoken. After this Orientalist gesture—establishing the foreigner's presence and knowledge of the other in the memoirs to follow—Haarhuis tells the readers how he came to know Sayuri. He saw her in the dance performance he attended as a boy, and their paths later crossed in New York in the 1980s, after he had become a famous historian of Japan. We

are also told of the critical role Haarhuis played in eliciting Sayuri's memoirs. Only by finding someone she could trust was Sayuri willing to record her life. In this self-introduction then, the American professor is central to the unfolding of the geisha's tale.

Central, too, is the place in which this story is told. It is only when outside Japan—in New York, where she has moved after retiring as a geisha—that Sayuri talks to the outsider about what "geisha simply do not talk" about. With this, the translator's note ends and the main story begins. When it does, the "voice" we now hear has been fictionalized twice over, with the author posing as both the storyteller herself and the academic authority, to whom (and only whom) the geisha has agreed to speak. These are both creative ploys, of course, not unlike those used by other authors in writing fiction. But the effect here seems particularly potent and readers particularly susceptible to believing the fiction. In the promotion surrounding the book, Golden often told the story of its writing, that it took nine years and the scrapping of two entire drafts to hit upon a strategy that worked—the first-person story of Sayuri beginning as a child. With this device, readers are introduced to geisha know-how as Sayuri learns it herself rather than having it pedantically intrude into the text.

The blurring of professorial and personal voices was quite intentional on Golden's part, then, and has been critical in the book's popularity. As is, the "professor" is an authenticating shadow in *Memoirs*. He is not the only one, however. So is Iwasaki Mineko (or at least until she denounced him), the "real-life" geisha who, introduced through a family friend, spoke to Golden with the same "candor" and "intimate detail" (433) that Sayuri herself grants Professor Haarhuis. In the promotional materials accompanying *Memoirs*, Iwasaki and Golden's access to her were invariably hyped, along with the juiciest snippet of her geisha stardom in the 1960s and 1970s, the high price of her *mizuage* (the coming-of-age ceremony where, in Golden's account, a geisha sells her virginity). This structure of the Western authority gaining entree into the foreign world is consistent with Orientalism as laid out by Said (Clifford 1988). As he argues, a power dynamic is at work when an outsider gains and publishes intimate knowledge of another (or an other) culture, all the while remaining private about his own (cultural) secrets. No matter how sympathetic the resulting portrayal, the relationship is inherently unequal, with power, both real and imaginary, weighted at one end.

Anthropologists have come under heavy criticism for precisely these dynamics in studying "other," typically less economically and industrially developed countries, within the framework of Euroamerican academia

(Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford and Marcus 1986). This has spurred anthropologists to be more self-reflexive in identifying their own positionality, as well as the rhetorical strategies they adopt when studying (and representing) other cultures. In this move to break down the self-other border in ethnography, anthropological "objects" have started to write back (against Western representations) and write about their own cultures. Calling this "oppositional culture," Said considered it a corrective to Orientalism (1979). *Memoirs* would seem to have adopted precisely this strategy, given the first-person voice the geisha's story is narrated through. Further, the book not only erects the "essences" of a culture through a catalogue of its customs but also adds a personal history—what Said also proposed for disrupting the static Orientalism of an archivist's essentialisms.

Yet in *Memoirs*, these would-be antidotes to Orientalism are pure fabrications, part of its artifice as a fictional memoir. Furthermore, the real-life native who lent her "native voice" to Golden has now claimed that she was exploited and misrepresented.[5] By her account, Iwasaki was victimized by a chauvinism consistent with (rather than oppositional to) Orientalism. She was shocked that Golden would expose her identity by using her name, picture, and personal history (and, in particular, details of her mizuage) in promoting his book. Furthermore, his portrayal of the geisha world differs strikingly from what she told him. In his hands, it is tawdry and smutty rather than cultured and refined; the book is a "potboiler" where geishas appear as prostitutes—more a fantasy of Western men than an accurate representation of Japanese geishas (Velisarious 2000, 65, 67).

Iwasaki Mineko sees her role in *Memoirs* as the flesh-and-blood geisha who was cannibalized to feed the ambitions of the powerful Western author. Golden's account, of course, is different. But the issue I raise here is not who is "right," but rather that of construction and how Sayuri is not only a fictional construct but also one constructed to feel "real" to a Western audience. And this realness, which borrows from but is not "reality," is an important factor in the popularity of *Memoirs* and the way it constructs the Orient.[6]

Story

The book starts out in 1929, when Sayuri (then named Chiyo) is aged nine, growing up in the fishing village of Yoroido. Dirt-poor, she lives with her sister and parents, an older, sober father and a sickly, beautiful mother whose eyes Chiyo inherits. Translucent and gray, these eyes are Sayuri's mark of beauty and also—"full of too much water," as a fortune-teller has related—

the sign of her distinctive personality, as understood by Sayuri herself. In *Memoirs* Golden uses eyes as a rhetorical device; we see Sayuri's beauty in her eyes, but it is also through her eyes that we come to see the world of Gion's geishas. How noteworthy then that these eyes mix something Western—gray color—with something eastern—"too much water"—a mixture through which Western audiences can see someone both like and unlike themselves.

Running to town to buy incense for her dying mother, Chiyo falls and is befriended by the owner of a seafood company—a man she's long admired for the refinement he embodies. Seeing him now at close range is so fascinating as to be almost erotic. Mr. Tanaka, in turn, watches her and is particularly taken by Chiyo's eyes. Told that she is beautiful, Chiyo returns home transformed, harboring fantasies that Mr. Tanaka will adopt her and her sister after their mother dies. When Mr. Tanaka indeed takes the girls away a week later, it is shocking to discover that it is to sell them to a broker who takes Chiyo to an *okiya* (geisha house) and the less attractive Satsu to a brothel in Kyoto.

Chiyo is now estranged from her family and home, to which she never returns. Besides this painful loss of family and home, Chiyo must now endure a world that is savage and mean. At the very bottom of her okiya, she serves everyone (save a fellow maid), and is continuously mistreated, particularly by the okiya's head (Granny), adopted "daughter" ("Mother"), and star geisha (Hatsumomo). The beauty associated with geisha culture is juxtaposed here with an ugliness of sensuously horrific dimensions. When she first meets Mother, for example, Chiyo is transfixed: "Every detail of this woman's kimono was enough to make me forget myself" (Golden 1997, 41). When Chiyo looks at the woman's face, however, she sees a "hideous-looking woman" with yellowish eyes that remind the girl of urination" (42). Chiyo is so fascinated, this time out of shock, that she rudely stares.

The reactions of readers are similarly ambivalent, drawn as readers are to the contrasts of beauty and hideousness that jarringly fluctuate throughout the book. Thus, as the story proceeds and Chiyo begins her geisha training two months later, we learn, on the one hand, such fascinating details as how geishas apply their makeup with nightingale droppings to form a white mask etched in designs such as the *sanbon-ashi* (three feet). On the other hand, savagery is rampant as well. In Hatsumomo, these two attributes coalesce in a meanness as striking as her beauty. Appropriately, it is Chiyo's dealings with Hatsumomo that move the plot for much of the book. Forever maneuvering to falsely incriminate the girl and therefore destroy her would-be

career, Hatsumomo has succeeded at one point in halting Chiyo's geisha training. It is at this moment of utter desperation, three years after coming to Kyoto and now aged twelve, when she meets the next most important man in her life after Mr. Tanaka. Called "the Chairman," Imamura Ken is a successful executive then in his mid-forties. Running into Chiyo while she is out on an errand and distraught and weeping, he offers her his handkerchief. Immediately this triggers a fantasy in Chiyo: "For a flicker of a moment I imagined a world completely different from the one I'd always known, a world in which I was treated with fairness, even kindness—a world in which fathers didn't sell their daughters" (Golden 1997, 110).

Significantly, it is only now that Chiyo resolves to do whatever she can to become a top-notch geisha. That her inspiration is, in large part, romantic longing that gets deferred for most of the book makes *Memoirs* a conventional romance in the American mode so perceptively analyzed by Janice Radway.[7] What distinguishes this story as (culturally) different, however, is the context of Gion and how Chiyo aims to not only get her man but also acquire a geisha's seductive charms. And the narrative hinges on this tension between the woman's search for pure love and the geisha's staging of performative seductions. *Memoirs* itself plays at the same border, between a historical text that informs and an entertaining story that seduces. And how Chiyo becomes seductive is both a lesson taught and a delicacy savored throughout the book.

Shortly after she meets the Chairman, Chiyo's life takes a radical turn. The geisha Mameha agrees to sponsor her as a "younger sister," thus restarting her training. As Mameha is highly successful and Hatsumomo's archrival, her motives seem apparent. While the plot is now driven by the nastiness of this rivalry, the narrative also fills with the sumptuous details of Chiyo's training. This includes an endless cycle of classes—in dance, song, tea ceremony, language—and skills, including the art of kimono, all of which she masters. And after two years of hard work, Chiyo advances to apprentice geisha at age fourteen, thereby becoming Sayuri.

The craft most highly prized about a geisha is also the one more delicately honed: feminine seductiveness. Building sensuality into her every move, from the movements of the high arts of dance and song to the lower ones of pouring sake and parrying bawdy jokes, Sayuri develops the eroticism that so distinguishes a geisha. Yet, in what is her hardest lesson, she also learns that money dictates everything in this world and that a geisha, despite (and because of) her value, is a commodity, bought and sold for cash. Though objet d'art, the geisha is also an object packaged for sale. This includes sex (at

least as it gets played—and played up—by Golden) but does not constitute prostitution per se. Rather, sexual arrangements are special—the auctioning off of a geisha's virginity at her mizuage ceremony and the selling of exclusive sexual rights to a patron (*danna*). A dramatic peak in the book, Sayuri's mizuage takes place when she is fifteen and, setting a record price, marks her status as a rising star and her triumph over Hatsumomo. Yet, as rendered on the pages of *Memoirs*, the mizuage is also a consummately repulsive ritual. The customer (Dr. Crab) is not only physically malformed but also a fetishist of the blood he collects in vials from all the mizuage he has paid for. One fan calls this deflowering scene the "creepiest" in the whole book. As for Sayuri, however, she finds it amusing "to think that the course of [her] entire future had been altered by this" (Golden 1997, 284).

More upsetting to her, however, is the realization that, even as a successful geisha, she has earned little agency. In what seems a sentiment elaborated for Western audiences, having to perform endlessly for others and deny her own nature is a pain that constantly haunts Sayuri. Yet choice is what she desires, and it is in romance that she seeks to find it. This gets staged as a dramatic triangle between Sayuri, the Chairman, and his right-hand man, Nobu Toshikaza (another Japanese man in this book with a bodily disfigurement). Through various complications—and endless chapters taking us through the wartime years—Sayuri curries a longtime friendship with Nobu, whose interest in her prevents the Chairman from acting himself. Nonetheless, Sayuri manages to keep Nobu from becoming her danna by various tactics, the last involving a curiously disgusting sex scene. Yet out of this grossness comes the romance Sayuri has so patiently and passionately yearned for, and that has been so long in coming. The Chairman and Sayuri indeed get together. Though, appropriately, according to everything we have been taught about the geisha world, Sayuri must now retire as a geisha and live as a kept woman by her new danna. While tremendously happy, Sayuri is not entirely fulfilled. Nostalgic for the geisha excitement she has lost, she recreates it in New York when, after moving there, she sets up a salon for visiting Japanese. It is here, forty years later and decades after her lover has died, that the book ends: with a Japanese geisha and the world of Gion she has remade in the United States.

Oriental Erotics: Three Trips, Three Texts

In his book *Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism, and Japan/Ideologies of Desire*, John Treat writes that we are all lovers when we travel to distant lands. "The student of another culture who travels there," he

writes, "goes thinking: I will watch how those people live, or work, or write, and then bring their lessons home. But he goes abroad as a man, or a woman, and so with his intellectual instincts goes too a sexed body. His desire for knowledge is easily confused with his desire to possess or be possessed by other things: passion" (1999, x). For the student, the world outside signals the borders of our knowledge and experience. To go beyond promises enlightenment, and its pursuit is marked by a certain epistemological urge—to learn a region's history, language, customs. But exploration of the foreign is not only intellectual, nor simply of places on the other side of the earth. Travelers also have sexed bodies, according to Treat, and this—the constellation of desires that stake our identities and organize our passions—includes, but transcends, both gender and sex. The latter indeed goes with us on our travels. But as the "foreign" involves new encounters, borders not only of territory but also of the self and desire open up in the process. In this sense, a lover's embrace both parallels the scholarly passion of foreign learning and is itself a type of travel to an other place.

When readers described their experience of *Memoirs* to me, it was often in language befitting a love affair. They would smile and get excited, talk quickly and move their bodies. Passion, bordering on arousal, was palpable, and what was verbalized was the sensation of being "moved"—by the gripping story, the beautiful writing, the visual magic. In almost all cases, the pleasure gained from reading *Memoirs* was analogized to travel taken to a "far-away place," a trip that, at once thrilling and eye-opening, was a break from the everyday and an immersion into something deeply personal and rewarding. As Steven Spielberg's screenwriter Ron Bass put it after reading the book: "It all seems so foreign, but once you get into the hearts and souls of the people, you recognize all the emotions and feelings."[8] In such a description, there is an element of both distance and intimacy, something both of, and not of, the self. Such an architectonic of distant intimacy also structures the Orientalist urge in what Homi Bhabha has called the ambivalence of the colonial encounter (Bhabha 1994). I now look briefly at three texts that (differently) capture this organization of passion and subjectivity around people and places perceived to be both other and not. My aim here is to step momentarily away from *Memoirs* in order to examine the complexity, density, and variability of distant intimacy at work in what I take to be the organizing passion in Orientalism.

In many ways *Madame Chrysantème* is the paradigmatic Orientalist text. Written under the pseudonym Pierre Loti, it is the memoirs of the Frenchman Julien Viaud's travels to Japan in the 1880s. Though he was a popular

writer like Golden, Loti's memoir was not fictional but autobiographical. In an entire series of books on foreign countries, Loti adopted the strategy of traveling to the place himself, taking on a lover, and using this relationship as a lens for viewing the culture. The genre of writing was anything but scholarly. Yet *Madame Chrysantème* was wildly popular throughout Europe, in large part because it was read as a factual text about a country shrouded in mystery (a situation not so different from that of many Americans viewing Japan today). Loti's book was taken as knowledge, but it also fed people's imagination with an erotic fantasy—Western man travels to the Orient, beds an Oriental woman, returns home—that inspired an entire tradition (including Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* and, more recently, the musical *Miss Saigon* and David Hwang's brilliantly deconstructive play, *M. Butterfly*).

At the book's beginning, Loti introduces Kiku, the woman he "marries" and renames "Madame Chrysantème." Though the book would seem to be about her, Loti immediately announces that the "three main personages are myself, Japan, and the effect produced on me by that country" (1935, 5). Accordingly, after inviting his readers to receive his book as exotica, Loti begins describing Japan through a litany of personal impressions. These start out complimentary—the country seems "enchanted" and "fairy-like" (12)—but soon turn deprecatory. The men have "yellow faces" (40) and the women, though "almost pretty," are doll-like (37). "Little" becomes the operative word in describing a country, "little, finical, affected" (242), through the contrasts it poses to Europe (the othering strategy so fundamental to Orientalism, according to Said).

Initially, the smallness of Japanese women is erotically appealing to Loti. Yet, even with Kiku, he soon grows bored of these charms—a beauty of delicacy, miniaturization, and a different cultural aesthetics. Viewing her, and by extension Japan, as no more than an amusing "plaything" and decorative "doll," Loti starts to detest the superficiality of this encounter, which he blames not on the cultural and linguistic chasm between the two, but on what he sees as emptiness in the other (Kiku, Japan). Concluding that "we have absolutely nothing in common with this people" (184), Loti abandons his study of Japanese and, shortly after, pays Kiku her money and returns home.

Like Pierre Loti, John Whittier Treat is a white, Western man who travels to Japan for reasons involving both passion and study. Unlike Loti, however, Treat's scholarship is serious and his passion is for men rather than women. On both scores, he is driven to Japan because, like a whole line of gay men in his field of Japanese literature, its otherness is not so much exotic as reso-

nant with his own: "I needed an escape route, ways out of the dull places that fettered us and ways into the realm of possibility" (1999, 47). And, arriving in the 1970s as a college student, Treat finds in Japan a receptive environment for both body and mind.

The book Treat published in 1999, *Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism, and Japan/Ideologies of Desire*, is his own account interspersed with that of multiple others of traversing borders (mainly though not exclusively involving Japan) in pursuit of knowledge, pleasure, or identity. The main narrative focuses on Treat and his trip to Japan in 1987–88 when, at the beginning of the AIDS scare in Japan that was getting blamed on foreigners and gays, Treat felt he had become the other in a place he once regarded as home. Fearing this would impair his vitality as a Japan scholar ("Suddenly the body as instrument, either for knowledge or pleasure, is rendered impotent" [x]), Treat nonetheless survives the year and remakes his connections to Japan in the process. In this, he reassesses his own intimacies with Japan and the Japanese in the past that, as he now realizes, have harbored Orientalist tendencies. Reflecting on his past, he recognizes the "prides and prejudices" that led him to expect privileges in Japan that inflected his own sexual tastes (dominance) with Japanese men.

The study of an other culture is always infused with not only passions of various kinds but also power: the breeding ground of Orientalism. Treat's corrective to this is to deconstruct the matrices conjoining intimacy, power, and cultural differences in his own life and at the level of his body—what has been his tool for both pleasure and knowledge.

In a reversal of Orientalism that interrogates others and protects the privacy of the self, here the scrutiny targets the Westerner by laying bare his sexual history, both across and apart from the Oriental divide. *Great Mirrors Shattered* is filled with accounts of Treat's sexual intimacies rendered in frank, often unflattering, detail. Unusual for the willingness to expose his own sexuality in an academic text where authors assume the role of authority, Treat makes an intervention against Orientalism and its cartography of desire and knowledge (Western authorities speaking for Oriental others, whom they also desire and unclothe).

Alessandro Baricco's novel *Silk* (1997) also features a traveler to Japan. This one is fictional rather than real, and he embarks upon travels to the Orient for business rather than study or passion. The scene is a small French town in the mid-1880s whose primary industry of silk production is being decimated because of a silkworm disease spreading through Europe. The community decides to go far afield—to Japan, which "in those days . . . was

effectively on the other side of the world" (Baricco 1997, 15)—to search for silkworm eggs. This job is assigned to Henri Joncour, a quiet, unassuming silk merchant who embarks upon his journey. The trip takes him forty days as he crosses one territory and border after another, and, though all of what he encounters is foreign and new, Joncour appears to notice little. Focused only on the job at hand, Joncour could be anywhere.

That is until he sees a beautiful young woman whose head rests on the lap of the Japanese man who brokers the sale of silkworm eggs to Joncour. She looks up at him, and the intensity of her glance as well as the uniqueness of her "non-oriental" eyes (both of which we encounter in *Memoirs*) fill Joncour with indescribable longing. He does not speak with the woman or see her again during this trip, but Joncour is so moved that he volunteers to return three more times to Japan, at great risk to himself and his community's investment. Each time he is accorded only the barest of contact with the woman—a caress over his face, a note in Japanese on a small piece of paper. Despite, and precisely because of, this elusiveness, Joncour's passion lasts a lifetime. As he describes it to a friend: "I have never even heard her voice. It is a strange sort of pain. To die of yearning for something you'll never experience" (Baricco 1997, 53).

Silk is a novel about Oriental desire, and it is brilliant for the erotic succinctness with which Baricco conveys Joncour's longing and the phantasmatic nature of its allure. Indeed, Joncour's wife comes not only to understand the fantasy but to manipulate it herself. Long used to the placidly predictable relationship shared with her husband, she becomes disturbed by his remoteness after he returns from Japan. Managing to figure out something of his infatuation, Helene writes Joncour a letter disguising herself as his phantom lover. Pushing the sexual fantasy even further by explicitly detailing what she would like to do with his body, she also concludes by telling Joncour they must never meet again. With this, the man's obsession gradually subsides and he returns emotionally to his wife. Only years later and after her death does Joncour learn the truth of Helene's letter-writing. With this and the revelation he now comes to about the nature of erotic longing—tethered to an imaginary other, its inability to be real or realized is what fuels rather than quells the desire—the book ends.

All three of these works—*Madame Chrysantème*, *Great Mirrors Shattered*, and *Silk*—record trips to Japan taken by Westerners and the discoveries of desire, knowledge, and selfhood acquired in the process. For all the protagonists, what is seen of Japan is heavily shaped by personal desire. Loti is drawn to Japan for fame and eroticism and writes a book that, despite

its name, is more about his own makeup than about Kiku or Japan. Treat travels to Japan as much for sexuality as for study, and his ties to Japan are both informed and affected by these pursuits. Joncour is driven to the Orient for material good and, later, romantic fantasy, and these two interests not only determine but also exhaust what Joncour comes to see (and know) of Japan. On all three of these travelers, Japan exerts a strong influence: one that ranges from utter distaste and arrogant self-confirmation on Loti's part to erotic arousal for Joncour, and to deep personal and epistemological involvements for Treat. Distance and intimacy are organized differently in all these cases, but consistent is some structuring of an us/them divide that shapes and is shaped by a range of desires. And what these texts show us is that the passions Orientalism harbors—of a self entangled with and against an other—are hardly singular, simple, or clean.

Intimacy

A woman in her seventies I interviewed was clearly dispassionate about *Memoirs*. When asked what she liked about the book, she said it showed a life completely different from her own. This world, however, struck her as very "trite." The descriptions of kimono and makeup were "impressive" but boringly excessive, and the characters seemed shallow, with implausible plot twists (such as Sayuri's becoming "enamored" of an older man at the age of twelve). More than anything, this woman spoke of "sadness" in the geisha world, by which she meant an "emptiness" and "bamboozling" associated with "selling bodies." "Japanese men come off looking pretty bad," she concluded, adding, "They should be home talking with their wives instead." She found the cultural differences in *Memoirs* to be distasteful, even repulsive, and her reaction, like Loti's, was that the Japanese of this world were empty (and Americans, by implicit contrast, morally better).

In the sense that this "traveler" learned little from her travels and reflected little on herself, the reading here of *Memoirs* is Orientalist. Strikingly different, at least on the surface, was the far more common response to the book of utter captivation and fascination. When describing their experiences reading *Memoirs*, many did so in the raptures befitting a love affair: the enthrallment of being "swept away" by the "eroticism" and "beauty" of the story and seductively "drawn into" a "veiled," "forbidden" world so thoroughly "foreign." Conjured up was an image of a dark, dashing lover with whom one's relationship was compelling, even illicit. Analogies of absorption were often used to describe the sensation of going on a "great adventure," "slipping into a silky hot bath," and getting engrossed in a painting "with very fine

brushstrokes." As Treat writes about passion, many readers felt "possessed" by what they encountered in *Memoirs*. They also expressed feelings of not only passive but also active possession, of enjoying the sensation of drawing back the curtain of a private, secretive world and not only viewing it (voyeuristically) but also entering and even inhabiting it.

Readers continually stressed how intriguing the world they discovered in *Memoirs* was. But this did not mean they necessarily liked or identified with what they found. What moved them instead was the newness, the difference, the unimaginable richness of it all that, revealed in such delicious detail, was reveled in like a sumptuous meal. A number of fans on Amazon .com described their reading experiences this way: being "swept away" from our "everyday lives" to a "universe foreign to Western civilization." As one person recommended the book, it is a "must read for anyone who wishes to leave home temporarily." Described as exotic escapism, this reaction is akin to what the black cultural studies scholar bell hooks (1992) means by "getting a bit of the other": a thrilling escape that leaves both the self and other intact after the ride. For its one-sidedness and adherence to notions of inalterable (cultural, racial) difference, such a response is Orientalist.

Certainly for most readers of *Memoirs* I spoke with there was the perception of considerable difference and distance between the world of the geisha and the reader's own. One middle-aged woman I interviewed in 1999 said, "I loved the book, but the geisha world is different you know: a different moral universe. Not bad; just different." Of course, this sense of otherness was precisely what compelled so many readers. Yet the encounter with such alterity—commonplace, after all, in contact with foreign worlds whether by novel, film, video game, or travel—could also be more profound than simply "getting a bit of the other." As my two most articulate interviewees (Ruth and Carol, both middle-aged, highly educated women) described the effect on them of reading *Memoirs*, there was an overlap between what was learned about geisha culture, what was evoked by Golden's sensuous writing, what was imagined through the panoramics of his descriptions, and what was experienced through a story that elicited a whole spectrum of human emotions. For these women, all the threads were woven and blurred together so that, like Treat's erotic epistemologies in Japan, their readings of *Memoirs* were aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional all at the same time.

The biggest factor by far in the popularity of this book was the laced texture of geisha culture, the lush elaborations geisha undergo to remake themselves as exquisite art pieces, which Golden conveys and mimics so skillfully with his storytelling. Strikingly, the effect here seems the inverse of

that described by Malek Alloula for the Algerian postcards, the costuming of exotic women to expose their flesh underneath. In *Memoirs*, the aesthetic comes more from building up than removing layers, and it is in these details of cultural difference that meaning, and eroticism, is invested.[9] As one reviewer put it, *Memoirs* is "as precious as a traditional Japanese kimono—at once artistic[,] suggestive, and moving." Ruth added to this that Golden's writing was not only beautiful but subtle, in that he evokes scenes and dramas indirectly, with all the delicacy of a geisha herself. Brilliant as well is the first-person voice that tells the story of a geisha from different perspectives of her life-stage, a voice with the childishness of a girl discovering a geisha's secrets for the first time but also that of an old woman reflecting on all she went through to become a geisha.

Readers often expressed familiarity, intimacy, or identification with the character Sayuri. This had to do less with Sayuri as a geisha (which most said they still found alien and totally at odds with anything they ever could imagine being or becoming) and more with her story as a woman. Most commonly I was told that Sayuri was a tough woman, whose life story of surviving and coping with the endless challenges and heartbreaks she encountered was pure triumphalism. While my own opinion and that of two others was that her obsession with the Chairman (which lasts for so long in the book, based on so seemingly little) undercuts Sayuri's image as a strong, independent woman, this view was little shared. More common was admiration for Sayuri as a resilient and resourceful woman, an impression not tainted by the fact that she both yearns to be, and often is, saved by men. The romance that, consummated in the end, makes for the type of happy ending Western (though not Japanese) readers are used to was also considered to be one of the great highs of the book, according to about 80 percent of the people I spoke to. (In the words of one interviewee, "'Whew!' was the reaction I had when she got together with him.") Some pointedly called *Memoirs* a Cinderella story—and apparently this was its attraction for Steven Spielberg in buying the rights to it for a movie[10]—and loved the rags to riches formula so familiar in the United States and such a stock trope in the American dream.

For some, perhaps many, *Memoirs* readers, there was a type of identification with Sayuri, not as a geisha but as a woman with a hard life and a fantasy love life. But for some *Memoirs* readers, there was more play, I sensed, with the border between the exotic and the self; the geisha is exoticized but as an exotic other that readers imagine trying on themselves (as Helene did in *Silk*). Certainly the masquerade part of this aesthetic is what a U.S. trend in voguing and geisha chic, started by Madonna, picked up—designing fash-

ion with a body erotics based on concealing rather than revealing flesh.[11] More to the point, perhaps, is the book's modeling of an alternative construction of sexuality and identification, one disconnected from the "truth" that so binds us in the West, as is Foucault's (1980) great insight. The geisha performs sensuality and selfhood with a playfulness that flirts with the border of reality rather than conforms to it. The truth of things is consistently disguised to feed the geisha's performativity and desirability as a fantasy woman. And both the customer and geisha are well aware of this construction.

In the geisha world everything is about artifice, which makes interactions here not so much false as beyond the conception of truth altogether. That this make-believe is a powerful erotic was the lesson learned by Helene and Joncour in *Silk*. As one of my interviewees (a middle-aged, professional woman) also revealed, the "tricks" a geisha uses to sensualize her being (pouring tea with just a hint of flesh exposed, for example) intrigued her. As a feminist, she had strictly avoided such feminine contrivances in the belief that they perpetuated the objectification of women. But in the context of *Memoirs*, she came to understand and appreciate such devices as part of a geisha's performative erotics. By contrast, another reader (woman, middle-aged, professional) was more critical of the seductions at work in *Memoirs*. Pointing out the scene in which the Baron "creepily but erotically" undresses Sayuri, she called this a "manipulation," because "two things are going on at once—a sort of male-seduction point of view mixed in with Sayuri's supposed resistance. Golden is the one being very creepy, because he's pretending to tell his character's truth but he's actually up to something else." As this woman suggested, Sayuri's story is played as the life of an independent woman, but she is also a vehicle of and for male desires. Precisely, I would say, except this dressing as erotic fantasy feeds desires that are not purely "male," given, for one, that the readership of *Memoirs* is overwhelmingly female.[12] Identity as well as passion is shifting here in ways that potentially unsettle old binarisms between female and male.

A trope of disguise, juxtaposed against its seeming opposite, truth, permeates the structure and pleasures of *Memoirs*. Geishas are in disguise, the book disguises itself as a "memoir," and Golden speaks in the guise of both a Japanese woman and an American professor. Much of *Memoirs*' hype, in fact, has centered around the ventriloquist's act staged by the book's author. Equally as important as these performances, however, are the truths—of Japan, Gion, the will to survive, ultimate love—that readers take away from *Memoirs* as well. Readers seem deeply attracted to this intermixture, iden-

tifying more with one side (the strong Sayuri, her romantic denouement) and playing more with the other (the geisha who performs eroticism). In this sense, one can see desires represented by both Treat (to know and possess and be possessed by passion) and Baricco (whose character, Joncour, is seduced by a fantasy that, by very definition, can never be real or realized). It is important to keep in mind, however, that the preoccupation in *Memoirs* with an inner truth that centers and reveals the self is a Western convention not consistent with (what I know at least about) Japan and its nightlife. Thus, while there is nothing untoward about Golden's writing a novelistic fantasy and fictional memoir, more problematic is how conflated these become with a "Japan" taken to be true by many readers. And in this lies its danger as Orientalism.

Conclusion: Phantoms and Fantasies

Memoirs is a novel that, like *Madame Chrysantème*, *Great Mirrors Shattered*, and *Silk*, is steeped in travel to a distant world at once accessible and foreign, inviting yet not. Fans tend not to identify with the geishadom they find here, but they are captivated by its spell nonetheless. This book moves readers, and not only in their heads but in their (sexed) bodies as well. But there is an interesting tension here; the eroticism of the exotic, as I have laid it out, actually hinges on the object remaining somewhat distanced and unknown—a masquerade that stays masked (and an object that stays an object). But Golden's book is also dressed and read as a scholarly textbook illuminating knowledge about Gion and Japan. So which is it? Or, given that readers say *Memoirs* both entertains and teaches, how does this work?

My own assessment is that *Memoirs* is, more than anything, a good story and, next, an exotic fantasy (which does not discount the personal impact it has on many readers). But given that the subject is geishas who themselves embody the fantasy of exoticism, what we "learn" in this book melds pretty seamlessly with everything else; the history is enveloped in the story that enfolds the fantasy. Masks get unmasked and remasked continuously throughout the book—perfect voyeurism. In saying this, I am not impugning the historicity with which Golden has done research to portray Gion with an accuracy that most scholars I know agree is good or certainly good enough. And the sense of ethnographic authenticity Golden projects is unquestionably important to almost all those who love this book the most. But when we ask why this aura of truth is so important to *Memoirs'* popularity, I am not convinced that it is merely or mainly for what people say: that it opens up a window onto a culture they know little about. And if it is, I find it disturb-

ing that this is the text, fictional and imaginary, about a behavior so minor, antiquated, and fetishized in Japan today. When readers say, "Orientals have always been a mystery, but this book taught me a lot," what Japan, and what about Japan, are they learning?

Surely, even those who make such statements are clearly aware that the postindustrial Japan of today is eons apart from the narrow streets of Gion, with its wooden teahouses and precious geishas. But this disconnect from the present adds to the fantasy, placing Japan in a romantic past where history gets emptied out and culture becomes timeless—what Barthes (1972) has described as the work of myth. (And mythically, the novel takes place in a bygone time, interwar, wartime, postwar, when Japan was getting defeated, then occupied, by the United States. For American readers, then, a form of imperialist nostalgia akin to Orientalism does indeed seem to be at play in the book.) Using distant places as metaphors, respites, or displacements for sexuality variously outlawed or repressed at home was long a pattern of colonialism (Kabbani 1986). With *Memoirs*, too, women readers are flirting with a different sensuality: they are in the delights of reinventing themselves, playing with masquerades, and engaging an erotics of objectification and performativity. And they want to know both how this is done and how to keep it distanced—something exotic enough to remain exciting and other (both to themselves and as an otherness valued precisely in these terms).

Such a sensual impulse, if I have hit the mark at all, hardly seems radical. Yet given the mainstream complexion of the *Memoirs* fandom and the sexual atmosphere of the United States in the late 1990s—with moralism abounding, commitment to the idea, if not always the practice, of marriage, and policing still waged against "nonconventional sex"—experimentation can be dangerous, and vicarious, voyeuristic travels, so much safer. Does this mean *Memoirs* is Orientalist? I would say yes, to the degree that it encourages readers to indulge fantasies played out through the disguise of projecting them onto someone else—an other not oneself. In this sense, the confusion between the historical authenticity of *Memoirs* and its fantasy story is problematic if and when readers read it unselfconsciously as a tale of someone else rather than themselves.

But I also urge us, in interrogating popular texts like *Memoirs*, to seriously engage, rather than merely discount, the fascination with cultural difference and erotic distance at work here. There is something to be learned from Golden's form of storytelling that makes his readers feel transported to another world. Scholars, too, need to pique the imaginations of our audiences

and make our material penetrate the skin, the heads, the senses of our students and readers. This means going beyond a rigid clinging to a reality only knowable through so-called facts to a greater willingness to understand (and deploy) the mechanics of the imagination, to treat geishadom, for example, not only in terms of its social history or political economy but also through the texture of seduction by which geishas perform their fantasy-making. To grasp this world, one needs to understand the pleasures and artifices of the fantasies involved, a terrain that should not be ceded to that of popular writers. In dealing with a subject like geishas (both fictional and real), scholars must seriously treat the construct of fantasy as well—something I have attempted in this chapter by tracking the architectonic of distant intimacy and realness so vital to the fascination *Memoirs* has held for U.S. fans. Equally important, however, in a venue so saturated in fantasy—and very unlike Golden here—is to seriously consider how, why, and with what effects this collapses into something like Orientalism. And, to broaden this point, we need to be attentive to the Saidian point about how cultural difference—what one comes to see, experience, and "know" of other cultures—is never simply out there but also and always shaped by what is in our own heads, desires, and fantasies.

In order to move beyond Orientalism, beyond the East-West divide that many say today's world of global capitalism and transnationalism has already transcended, we need to learn from what Golden performs, and what Treat and Baricco deconstruct, about the allure of foreign travel. How to tell better stories that are imaginative and compelling, without falling into the trap of exoticizing or essentializing (or of doing either without reflecting on the desires this involves for the self), is the task I see for us (would-be) post-Orientalists.

Notes

1. The movie, released by Sony Productions, was somewhat of a bust. Though visually beautiful and praised (though also criticized) for the three Chinese actresses (Ziyi Zhang, Gong Li, and Michelle Yeoh) assigned the roles of the Japanese geisha, the story was found to be, in general, boring and bland. One reason for this contrast to the book's popularity would seem to be in the excess of ethnographic detail—attention paid to geisha hairstyles, kimonos, training, intrigue—that the film indulged, as had the novel. But whereas readers took this rendering of foreignness to be exciting for the way it allowed readers to visually imagine and ethnographically grasp the exotica of the geisha's world, film viewers found such detail to be boring in a medium, Hollywood movies, whose storytelling is more known for fast-paced action. Though the contrast raises

important issues about cultural mediation and mediated foreignness (what I pursue in this chapter through Orientalism), I will concentrate my attention here only on the book version of *Memoirs of a Geisha* for reasons of time.

2. Viewing foreign others in pairs of opposites has a long history in the West. Columbus saw the New World Indians as both noble savages and "dirty dogs" (Todorov 1984), and Ruth Benedict (1989) analyzed Japan as a culture of both brutality and aesthetic refinement.

3. This quote and those that follow are taken from postings on Amazon.com during 1998 and 1999.

4. Most of the people I interviewed or spoke to about *Memoirs* said they had known little about Japan before reading the book. One interviewee (middle-aged office worker in Boulder, Colo.), for example, told me in this context that "Japanese culture is not that wide-known, not like other cultures."

5. Iwasaki has subsequently come out with her own book (2002) that gives a very different rendition of her life as a geisha. The mizuage involves no sex at all, for example, and Iwasaki seems to have much more say in her romantic life than the fictional Sayuri, who remains thwarted for years in *Memoirs*.

6. Katherine Frank (2002) has discovered a similar pattern in U.S. strip clubs, where dancers construct identities (assuming made-up names, histories, personalities, and interests) and are constantly quizzed by their customers as to how truthful they are being. Jeannie Livingstone has recorded a similar desire for performed identities that look and seem "real" in her documentary *Paris Is Burning*, about drag balls.

7. As Janice Radway showed in her groundbreaking book *Reading the Romance* (1984), the readers of harlequin romances she studied use these stories as a form of fantasy escape to both endure and reimagine their conventionally heteronormative family-centric lives.

8. James Sterngold, "Spielberg Looks to the East," *New York Times*, September 11, 1998.

9. I thank Purnima Mankekar for this insight. This is also the construction of erotics outlined by Roland Barthes (1972) in his essay on the Parisian striptease: a model who, overly dressed in accessories and props (feather boas, long gloves, pearls), slowly removes each piece. With this, the stripper seduces her audience more by the excessive overlay of clothing she has added to her body than by the nudity she is ultimately reduced to. As Barthes argues, nakedness here has become de-eroticized, and it is the artifice of ploy, clothing, and performance that makes the stripper and striptease erotic; the same, of course, could be said of the geisha.

10. Sterngold, "Spielberg Looks to the East."

11. Madonna was at the forefront of the geisha vogue, appearing as a black-haired, red-lipped, kimono-dressed "geisha" for months, including on the cover of *Harper's Bazaar*. In an interview with Larry King, she said her "whole new look" was inspired by reading *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which she called a "great book." And, exemplifying the structure of erotics laid out here, Madonna added that the character of Hatsumomo (the nasty, conspiring geisha) served as her "muse" for six months: an Oriental object to be mimicked rather than bedded or consumed. When Larry King asked her if this were

not more a style than an identity, Madonna laughed that she was always changing who she was and trying on new personae ("Interview: Madonna Reviews Life on Larry King Live," http://www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Music/9901/19/madonna.lkl/, January 19, 1999).

12. Here the conventional gendering of Orientalist erotics (Western man desiring Oriental woman) gets reorganized; desire for the Oriental woman is more a female than male fantasy, and the desire is less to "have" her than to "be" her—more erotic mimicry than erotic lust.

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PURNIMA MANKEKAR is associate professor of gender studies and Asian American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Duke University Press, 1999) and the coeditor with Gordon H. Chang and Akhil Gupta of *Caste and Outcast*, by Dhan Gopal Mukerji (2002).

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Media, erotics, and transnational Asia / Purnima Mankekar and Louisa Schein, eds.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8223-4559-6 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8223-4577-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Mass media—Social aspects—Asia. 2. Mass media and the arts—Asia. 3. Sex in mass media. 4. Sex in popular culture.
I. Mankekar, Purnima, 1961– II. Schein, Louisa, 1957–
P96.S452A78 2012
302.23'095—dc23 2012011624

Drawing on methods and approaches from anthropology, media studies, film theory, and cultural studies, the contributors to *Media, Erotics, and Transnational Asia* examine how mediated eroticism and sexuality circulating across Asia and Asian diasporas both reflect and shape the social practices of their producers and consumers. The essays in this volume cover a wide geographic and thematic range and combine rigorous textual analysis with empirical research into the production, circulation, and consumption of various forms of media.

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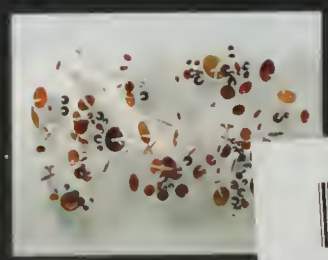

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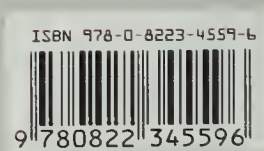
ISBN 978-0-8223-4559-6



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